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**Women Dancing on the Edge of Time
Reframing female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality**

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**Women Dancing on the Edge of Time: Reframing female (a)sexualities
through Zorbitality**

Aoife Sadlier

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries,
King's College London**

Declaration

I, Aoife Sadlier, declare that this thesis is my own work. All references have been cited and the word limit does not exceed that prescribed in the College regulations.

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Abstract

In the early twenty-first century, asexuality has emerged as a sexual orientation category, defined as a 'lack' of sexual attraction. This thesis challenges such a definition, arguing that it erodes individual idiosyncrasies; assumes that everyone is sexual, and that sexuality is immutable; and fails to note that sexual orientation labels are products of patriarchy and capitalism. A study of female (a)sexualities is long overdue. Very little has been written on the topic. Furthermore, with the rise of postfeminism, women are often represented as desiring their sexual objectification, whilst the narratives of asexual-identified women are in danger of being lost. In response, this thesis poses two questions. Firstly, what are the junctures and disjunctures between discursive representations of female (a)sexualities and women's engagements with (a)sexualities across their life spans? Secondly, what are the embodied moments when female (a)sexualities are in transition, and in particular, what role do ecstatic collective movement rites play in these shifts?

To answer these questions, this thesis employs three methodologies: (i) a two-part genealogy, comprising a sociohistorical exploration of female (a)sexualities and alternative narratives, articulated through the literary imaginary, Western and Afro-diasporic dance and Zumba; (ii) 'me-search,' featuring nine autobiographical passages written between September 2013 and August 2016; and (iii) collective biography workshops with nine women/life history interviews with seven women, conducted from April to June 2015. The data suggested that patriarchal structures constrain women's collective ecstatic motion. This led to the emergence of a new concept for reframing female (a)sexualities: Zorbitality. Zorbitality is a resistant imaginary, which navigates a threefold process from vulnerability to inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. It harnesses the collective joy of Zumba, a global Latin dance fitness phenomenon, as a central example. Zorbitality features realigned and ever-shifting erotic poles, from autoeroticism to polyamory. Ultimately, as a resistant imaginary, Zorbitality challenges representations of 'asexuality' as a categorical orientation, by situating collective ecstatic motion as the basis of a feminine libidinal economy, which embodies an ethical openness to otherness.

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Preface and acknowledgements

Preface

These moments and movements are not towards the transformation of ourselves into new subjects in linear time. Rather, the transformation lies in a particular form of attention to the remembered moment, an attention that makes the subject's vulnerability to discursive power starkly visible while also making visible the constitutive powers of the subject-in-process (Davies and Gannon 2006: x)

This thesis searches for myriad origins, deconstructs them and continuously performs them anew. It starts from the view that various genealogies interact in a continuous dancing process. Therefore, it seeks to draw together sociohistorical, personal and collective accounts of female (a)sexualities and to reconfigure them through the power of collective ecstatic motion. Indeed, this thesis contends that it is in the transformational moments of the everyday that female (a)sexualities are in flux and move to new horizons.

This thesis adopts the historical transformation of Afro-diasporic rhythms as its grounding metaphor (Madrid and Moore 2013). In the process, it navigates Western colonisation of Latin America from the late fifteenth century, which was instrumental to the creation of capitalism, and had an impact on the quest for knowledge in social science disciplines. Indigenous populations were largely wiped out, along with their unique concepts of time and space, based around the ever-flowing circle rather than the line (Guardiola-Rivera 2010). Furthermore the collective danced rites of West Africa became infused with European couple dance in 'the New World,' in such a way that the dyadic formation appeared natural. This process completed the erasure of Dionysus, the asexual Greek god of dance, whose collective ecstatic rites had been prominent within the Western tradition, until the rise of Christianity and European conquest (Ehrenreich 2007).

The Western colonisers also colonised women's bodies, through their focus on a system of exchange that constrained women's ecstatic movement. The effects can be seen in women's accounts in the twenty-first century, where we are forced to articulate ourselves through terminology founded largely by white

heterosexual men and an economic system that privileges their desires. It is from this very system that asexuality emerges as a 'lack.' Yet, as this thesis shows, there is power in both our individual narratives and collective voices. My life writing explores my discovery of Zumba as a source of joy in March 2012 and asexuality as a personal identification marker in September 2012, as well as subsequent shifts in my subjectivity, marked by the revelation that sexual orientation categories are actually products of patriarchy and capitalism. Equally, the memories of the women I spoke to are testament to a radical process, since many of their (a)sexualities shifted throughout their life spans *and* in situated moments of becoming. This focus on life writing in a PhD thesis may be perceived as unconventional. Yet, at this juncture, it is completely necessary. As Cixous (1976 [1975]) reminds us, phallogocentric regimes have enchained us for too long, and stopped us from speaking of our expansive desires. Now we need to dance around the structures that oppress us, weaving a new tapestry that holds a broader range of female subjectivities.

Whilst I draw on collective ecstatic motion as the basis of a new *feminine* libidinal economy, Zorbitality, I also wish to highlight how Zorbitality holds the wellbeing of *all* human beings in its grasp. As Riley (1987) asserted, the category of woman is not stable across history or culture, and indeed could better be seen as a dancing process. Therefore, Zorbitality allows us to rethink a new way of envisioning the collective in the twenty-first century: starting from a position of vulnerability, then extending to an ethical openness to otherness, where differences across the boundaries of sexual orientation, race and class are transcended via the propelling act of collective motion.

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stimulated my creativity and made me realise that I could develop a novel theory that drew on my obvious passion for Zumba as the basis of Zorbitality. Without Professor Reading's expertise in memory studies and Professor Kabir's in Afro-diasporic dance, I would not have realised my creative potential. I also thank the ESRC for funding this research, and the staff at the Bloomsbury Coffeehouse for sustaining my everyday existence in Limboland (my affectionate term for Bloomsbury, the site of my scholarly endeavours).

I wholeheartedly thank Zumba Fitness not only for the joy it has given me, but also for how it has *transformed* me for the better, and *sustained* me throughout this research process. I am not joking when I say that Zumba has been a lifeline for me. I will cherish the memories of my Zumba classes at ULU (University of London Union), three dots of joy that always punctuated my week. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my trilogy of Zumba teachers: Alejandra Loreto Quintana Alvarez, Charlotte Kabagwera and María Elena Venthoye Devora. These incredible women inspired me to train as a Zumba teacher in March 2015 and to begin teaching in July 2015. I now have left old Zumba communities behind, which brings deep sadness. Yet, I have created new ones. Therefore, I wish to thank each and every person I have ever Zumba-ed with, in the past and present. In particular, I thank Jutta Palmen, Luisa Boada, Maria Totschnig and Emily Prisuta, my Zumba 'chickenz,' as I affectionately call them, who always tell me how happy my classes make them.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 - Invitation to a dance

'Dance, dance, otherwise we are lost' (Pina Bausch 1940-2009, in *Pina* 2011).

This thesis extends an invitation to dance around the patriarchal structures that have historically constrained female ecstatic movement. Throughout the following chapters, female (a)sexualities¹ and indeed the category of 'woman' will be viewed as dancing processes, which we can continually deconstruct and reconstruct in light of our collective dance. Furthermore, as I will continually highlight, the internalisation of a collective ecstatic spirit can act as a resistant imaginary, which can enable the articulation of an alternative feminine libidinal economy, whilst building a more ethical society for *all* humans.

The title of the thesis takes inspiration from Marge Piercy's novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1979 [1976]). The novel's main protagonist, a Chicana² woman called Connie Ramos, works against the dominant regimes that enchain her, by intermittently escaping to a futurist utopia through time travel. In this utopia, heteronormative structures are not the basis of society, and collective ecstatic motion is celebrated in everyday life. The title of Piercy's novel has been reworked in this thesis to highlight dance as an important expression of vital female bodily agency, which has sociohistorically and cross-culturally been denied under patriarchy (Cixous and Clément 1986). The first word has also been changed to 'women' to emphasise the importance of relations between women across time and space, rather than just narrating my own personal dance of becoming with regards to (a)sexualities, marked by ecstatic shifts.

Movement is built into the structure of the thesis, as two dance narratives act as reference points. These are (i) Stravinsky's (1913) ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, in which a young woman is chosen as a sacrificial offering by the male elders of a

¹ Throughout this thesis, I draw on the word (a)sexualities, rather than 'asexuality' or 'asexualities.' The bracketing of the (a) seeks to destabilise asexuality as a categorical orientation that implies a 'lack' of sexual attraction and highlight that one may move in and out of asexuality throughout one's life.

² Chicana refers to a woman of Mexican origin who was born in and who resides in the US.

pagan community and dances herself to death for the gods of Spring³ and (ii) Beto Pérez's 'Zumba fitness,'⁴ the global Latin dance fitness phenomenon, grounded in Afro-diasporic rhythms, which has become a powerful expression of my vital body, spontaneity and ceaseless energy. The narratives will build to a climax by the end of Chapter 6, where one of my respondents, Martha, displays vulnerability and strength in a danced scene, which brought about fundamental changes in her subjectivity. By this point, I hope to convince you, as Cixous and Clément (1986) articulate in their theory of the feminine libidinal economy, that the female body in motion can thwart patriarchal structures.⁵ Yet, referencing Stacey's (1999) work, I wish to argue for a 'feminine specificity without falling into the trap of biological essentialism' (Stacey 1999: 263). Ultimately, I wish to highlight how the ecstatically moving female body is a powerful expression of vital life. This is particularly relevant to a reconceptualisation of female (a)sexualities in the twenty-first century, as I will now describe.

In the twenty-first century, asexuality has become synonymous with sexual orientation, being described by psychologists and the asexual community as a 'lack' of sexual attraction (Bogaert 2004: 279; AVEN 2016). This definition is problematic, as it erodes individual idiosyncrasies, assumes that everybody is sexual and that sexuality is immutable. Furthermore, it denies the fact that sexual orientation categories are products of patriarchy and capitalism. At this juncture, a study of female (a)sexualities is long overdue. Firstly, very little has been written on the subject. Myra T. Johnson's (1977) chapter was perhaps the only offering. She highlighted the dangers of reducing asexual-identified women to symbols of spiritual devotion or political consciousness at the absence of examining their lived realities, a concern that still resonates in the twenty-first century. Secondly, as Gill and Scharff (2011) assert, with the rise of a postfeminist sensibility whereby women are represented as desiring their own sexual objectification, the possibility of new female subjectivities is being

³ See section 3.2 (pp. 104-107).

⁴ Zumba was created by Alberto (Beto) Pérez in the 1990s, and incorporates four core rhythms: Merengue, Salsa, Cumbia and Reggaeton. In recent years it has adopted an increasing array of international genres. See section 3.4 (pp. 123-127).

⁵ The term 'libidinal economy' first surfaced in Lyotard's (1974) work, which highlighted the reciprocal relationship between politics and the libido.

limited for *all* women and the narratives of asexual-identified women are in danger of being lost. Therefore, a study of female (a)sexualities is particularly relevant to the twenty-first century. Finally, this thesis focuses on women, because as Young (2005 [1980]) demonstrated, female bodily agency is constrained within heteronormative spaces in the Western world. Although heteronormative culture is undoubtedly limiting for men, its effects are not as marked as for women, due to deeply ingrained patriarchal structures. Thus, the collective motion of women is central to this thesis.

My concept, Zorbitality, which I will develop in this thesis, takes the Caribbean and by extension Latin America as a central locus for its theorisations.⁶ This is because the history of the Caribbean challenges the unitary notion of a subject, as it is characterised by transformation and the merging of different cultures. As Hall (2001[1995]: 282) notes: ‘... if the search for identity always involves a search for origins, it is impossible to locate in the Caribbean an origin for its peoples.’ Furthermore, as Benítez-Rojo (1996) highlights, the difficulty in studying the Caribbean is its lack of historical continuity. Its various European languages, brought from the time of the conquests, its African and Asian heritages, are full of time shifts and indefinite interactions. However, this very lack has created a sense of rhythmic vitality, characterised by ‘processes, dynamics, and rhythms that show themselves within the marginal, the regional, the incoherent, the heterogeneous, or, if you like, the unpredictable that coexists with us in our everyday world’ (*ibid*: 3). The Caribbean represents endless flux, sketching in ‘an “other” shape that keeps changing’ (*ibid*). Finally, Caribbean history exists as ‘one of the main strands in the history of capitalism’ (*ibid*: 5), where from the fifteenth century Western colonisers set their anchors and began to capitalise on the economies of the local people.⁷ As Mbembe (2002)

⁶ As noted by Guardiola-Rivera (2010: 372-373), on 23 February 2010, the Cancún Declaration on the Unity of Latin America and the Caribbean was signed, thus uniting both sites in terms of economic and political goals. This conception includes all countries of South America, Central America and the Caribbean islands. Therefore, I often cite ‘Latin America’ in this thesis, since the Caribbean is held within its grasp. Yet, in moments where I wish to refer to the origins of Latin America’s musical life, I reference the Caribbean, since the Caribbean was ‘discovered’ prior to Central and South America.

⁷ To be more specific, Guardiola-Rivera (2010) suggests that capitalism was invented on 4 March 1517, when Cortés, the coloniser of Mexico, demanded gold and captured King

notes, the colonisers involved African people in their own subjection, since African middlemen could make profit from the capturing and selling of slaves, with the promise of 'upward mobility' (Mbembe 2002: 263). It is in this system of colonial exchange that female (a)sexualities also have their roots. Asexuality is constructed as a 'lack' in the twenty-first century because it does not support the capitalist economy. Yet, in a similar manner to Caribbean identities, this sense of 'lack' could be seen as an internalisation of a coloniser's discourse (Hall 2001 [1995]). Furthermore, it is the colonisers' oppression of collective ecstatic movement rites that this thesis acknowledges and subverts, by drawing on collective ecstasy as its tool of resistance. This addresses Hall's (*ibid*: 291) aim for twenty-first century Caribbean identities: that we should not take 'old identities literally,' but rather, we should use 'the enormously rich and complex cultural heritages to which history has made them heir, as the different musics out of which a Caribbean sound might one day be produced.' Zorbitality thus looks to an ethical futurity, where new possibilities are opened up for female (a)sexualities. With these points in mind, the following questions will be asked:

Research questions

- **What are the junctures and disjunctures between discursive representations of female (a)sexualities and women's engagements with (a)sexualities throughout their life spans?**
- **What are the embodied moments in which female (a)sexualities are in transition, and in particular, what role do ecstatic collective movement rites play in these shifts?**

These questions bring into relief two temporalities: (i) historical (female (a)sexualities over different epochs) and (ii) personal (female (a)sexualities in relation to individual women's life spans). Furthermore, they reference my

Montezuma. Whilst it could be argued that capitalism has earlier origins in the merchant trade of the European Middle Ages, I agree with Guardiola-Rivera's (*ibid*: 347-348) assertion that: 'Pizarro and Cortés invented capitalism not because they formed companies, got capital and invested such capital with a view to future profits, but, rather, because in doing so they captured the margin between different systems of value without reciprocating, and took advantage of that margin.'

concept of Zorbitality as a vital female subjectivity grounded in transformative movement, as I will now describe.

1.2 - Defining Zorbitality

Zorbitality is an emergent concept, which I have devised, that seeks to transcend the societal structures that constrain women's ecstatic movement, and to develop an alternative vision of female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion.⁸ In particular, it draws on the historical transformation of Afro-diasporic rhythms, situated in Latin America, as a resistant resource.⁹ Madrid and Moore (2013) show how Afro-diasporic rhythms have evolved over time, and within situated moments, through the experimentation of individual dancers and musicians. Referencing this, Zorbitality highlights both the *historical evolution* of female (a)sexualities, and the possibility for new female subjectivities to emerge in *situated moments of becoming*.

Zorbitality is coined through a number of words, each of which expresses movement in a different way: Zumba, Zorb, Orbit and Vitality. Firstly, Zorbitality draws on the collective joy of Zumba, a twenty-first century global Latin dance fitness phenomenon, as a central example. However, Zorbitality can be accessed through other collective movement rites. Zumba's vital life parodies the capitalist system from which it emerged, since its sense of collective joy may be integrated into everyday life. Furthermore, Zumba highlights the eternal transformation of Afro-diasporic rhythms and opens up new relational possibilities through the specific configuration of solo within a collective. The second word, 'zorb,' is an object that enables a new way of moving. It is a plastic circle, in which one stands, walks and directs movement.

⁸ The emergent concept is a term introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1994 [1991]) in *What Is Philosophy?*, to designate a conceptual and analytical mode for examining new cultural phenomena.

⁹ As Mignolo (2005) highlights, the term 'Latin America' is a construction. Furthermore, as González Echevarría (1996: xi) notes, the French ruler, Napoleon III, coined the term as an imperialist strategy in the nineteenth century: 'They opposed Latin to Anglo America to claim for political gain a historical and linguistic kinship with regions recently freed from Spanish domination.' As Mignolo (2005: xv) asserts, the term would then be adopted by Creole elites, which would serve to rank them below Anglo Americans and devalue the Indian aspect of their culture.

One is cocooned and safe, within one's own kinetic sphere. On a micro level, the word 'zorb' contains 'orb,' a circular ball of light that is often seen in digital photography, sometimes with trails that suggest motion and a transferral of energy. This resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) concept of the rhizome, which Glissant (1997: 11) describes as:

an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root.

The third word, 'orbit,' suggests movement in a circular rather than linear way. Perhaps, it best suggests 'a circularity with volume' (*ibid*: 32), which looks beyond the 'arrowlike nomadism' (*ibid*: 18) of Western colonisers, to the power of 'circular nomadism' (*ibid*). In circular nomadism, 'uprooting can work towards identity, and exile can be seen as beneficial, when these are experienced as a search for the Other... rather than as an expansion of territory...' Furthermore, as Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) theory of flow suggests, to orbit means to move above and beyond what one expects one can do, reaching a sense of inner ecstasy, where one feels deeply connected with others.¹⁰ In its basic form, Zorbitality may be reached in the process of physically embodied collective ecstatic motion. Yet, just like the imagined presence of the mythological god of collective ecstasy, Dionysus, whose followers danced themselves into a trance, others do not need to be physically present for Zorbitality to be accessed. Thus, Zorbitality reaches its strongest manifestation through the *internalisation* of a collective spirit, which may be drawn upon as a resistant imaginary in times of vulnerability.¹¹

Contained within the final word, 'vitality,' is the vital energy of embodied experience, as well as the last letters of the word 'digital.' Zorbitality disrupts the linearity of neoliberal regimes and the capitalist commodification of human desires, emphasising experimentation and collective joy. Thus, Zorbitality extends Braidotti's (2006: 4) theory of nomadic subjectivity as 'a non-

¹⁰ For a more detailed analysis of Deleuze and Guattari's and Csikszentmihalyi's theories in relation to the lived Zumba experience, see section 3.4 (pp. 120-123).

¹¹ For a visual representation of this, see Zorbital Flow 5 (pp. 271-272).

essentialist brand of vitalism,' by showing how this vitalism may be encountered in a collective movement experience, which can be integrated into everyday life. Zorbitality engages with biopolitics: the interaction between the biological and the discursive as manifested in processes of health, pleasure and sexuality, thus 'exposing the opening of the body and of life itself, to its own historicity and indeterminacy' (Giorgi 2002: 35). Vitality in this context embodies movement and transformation.

Zorbitality embodies an ethical openness to otherness, and enables a celebration of one's body for oneself, whilst experiencing a collectivity with others on local and global scales. Whilst Gilroy (2004: 4) argues that such an endeavour often 'appears old-fashioned, new-agey, and quaintly ethnocentric,' I justify it by abandoning 'notions of identity and belonging that are overly fixed...' (*ibid*: 5). Thus, I respond to Gilroy's (*ibid*: xv) call to replace the term identity with 'conviviality' to suggest a sense of ecstatic motion, and to draw on the word 'planetarity' to specify 'a smaller scale than the global,' which also emphasises the collective. Furthermore, I draw on Glissant's (1997: 11) assertion that an ethical openness to otherness exists in a 'poetics of relation.' He describes this as 'a poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible' (*ibid*: 32). In fact, opening ourselves to otherness in a non-essentialising way challenges the myth of one truth and acts as an 'ethical principle' (*ibid*: 154).

Zorbitality features realigned erotic poles, from autoeroticism to polyamory, expanding from an ever-moving centre, where sexual pleasure is not seen as having its natural base in heterosexual dyadic formations (Van Anders 2015). Neither is it necessarily genital, as Western theories of sexuality would have us believe. In essence, as Ehrenreich (2007: 39) argues, collective ecstasy is 'asexual.' Speaking of Dionysus, the mythical Greek god of collective ecstasy, Ehrenreich (*ibid*) remarks: 'The fact that he is asexual may embody the Greeks' understanding that collective ecstasy is not fundamentally sexual in nature, in contrast to the imaginings of later Europeans.' Zorbitality is collective joy, spread diffusely through the world via various trans-migrations. It is the

transformation of a negative energy held in the 'lack' of asexuality, into a positive and life-affirming concept, which turns life into a unified experience.

Most significantly, as I will emphasise throughout this thesis, Zorbitality answers and extends Braidotti's (2006: 33) call for a 'sustainable nomadic ethics,' which 'implies a new way of combining self-interests with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or environmental interconnections' (*ibid*: 35). A sustainable nomadic ethics takes *zoe*, 'the endless vitality of life as continuous becoming' (*ibid*: 41) as its starting point.¹² In response, Zorbitality offers a resistant imaginary, which enables one to live ecstatically in the present. It turns vulnerability to strength through collective ecstatic motion. Zorbitality is an example of what Braidotti (*ibid*: 170) refers to as figurations:

... forms of literal expression which represent that which the system had declared off-limits. There are situated practices that require the awareness of the limitations as well as the specificity of one's location. They illuminate all the aspects of one's subjectivity that the phallogocentric regime does not want us to become.

Thus, in summary, Zorbitality is an emergent concept, coined by me, which offers a new conceptual and analytic mode for viewing female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion, and which situates itself in Latin America as a symbol of hybridity and historical transformation.¹³

1.3 - Zorbital Analysis

Through the concept of Zorbitality, I have developed a Zorbital analytic mode. Zorbital analysis allows us to reconfigure female (a)sexualities through transformation, movement and dance. It focuses on the power of the *triad* rather than the dyad. It is the threefold *process* underpinning Zorbitality itself, characterised by the journey from vulnerability to inner ecstasy and collective

¹² *Zoe* refers to the vitality of non/pre-human animal life, while *bios* refers to political and discursive life. In this thesis, *zoe* is utilised on two levels, as the: 1. Process of becoming where identity categories break down and one lives in an ecstatic present and 2. Upsetting of 'established categorical distinctions of thought' (Braidotti 2006: 142).

¹³ I do not want to romanticise the idea of Latin America. Rather, I wish to draw on the resistant possibilities of its historical transformation.

ecstatic motion. Firstly, vulnerability is created through confinement within patriarchal structures and an awareness that one cannot move. Secondly, this transforms into inner ecstasy, through the creative transgression of patriarchal structures in everyday life. Key to this is the *transformative moment*, where one's subjectivity dances, yet where one does not necessarily engage in physical movement.¹⁴ The Zorbital process reaches its epitome in collective ecstatic motion, which occurs when one engages in a collective movement rite. Yet, Zorbitality extends this, since it embodies an internalisation of collective ecstasy. This allows one to transcend threats to one's vulnerability and offers a resistant imaginary that appeals to Braidotti's (2006: 33) sustainable nomadic ethics. I wish to highlight that although each of the Zorbital processes is distinct, each overlaps. Thus, Zorbital analysis defies the logic of Western thought, which views processes as linear.

Zorbital analysis has three modes of articulation: movement, thought and writing. 'Zorbital' movement means letting go of established ways of moving. Common rhythms can still be shared, as in the history of Afro-Caribbean dance or in the Zumba collective. Yet, none of these should be reduced to one genre or personal movement style. Zorbital thought goes beyond established categories. It is neither linear nor circular. Rather, it contends that history, self and collective are deeply enmeshed (see Cavarero 2000 [1997]). It challenges the myth of 'origin' that reduces human beings to essences by virtue of the identity categories they inhabit (Riley 2000). Zorbital writing is a new way of writing the female body, whilst not overdetermining sexual difference, thus referencing Cixous's (1976 [1975]) work. It acknowledges the possibility of multiple overlapping genealogies. Like Latin American dance, where Amerindian,¹⁵ European and African elements cannot be easily traced, it transcends a Western narrative of linearity and instead expresses the nature of Afro-Caribbean syncopations, 'characterized by a sequence that always returns to the beginning

¹⁴ See Zorbital flow 1 (pp. 267-268).

¹⁵ Western colonisers of the 'New' World coined the term 'Amerindian,' by drawing the words 'American' and 'Indian' together. I am aware that it is part of a coloniser's discourse. Yet, I will challenge this firmly in chapter 6, when I reference alternative histories of Pre-Columbian indigenous populations (see pp. 226-238).

in a cyclical movement which is endlessly repeated' (Schelling 2004: 193). Zorbital analysis prizes *transformation* within the writing process itself, looking to historical, personal and collective origins, whilst showing how these genealogies can be transformed in new configurations. 'Origins' are explored, deconstructed and then performed anew. Zorbital analysis thus reconceptualises time, space and memory, as I will now describe.

Time, space, memory

Through Zorbital figurations, I concede that linear time is a Western construction. As Glissant (1997: 51) highlights, key to this linearity is the myth of Oneness, forged through two key genealogies: (i) the before and after of Christ and (ii) the generalised theory of Darwinian evolution. These myths obliterate 'the existence of the other as an element of relation' (*ibid*: 50), a point that this thesis seeks to address. I draw on Bergson's (1911 [1896]) concept of duration, in which a person goes through a series of transformations, where sustainable changes are enacted within a collective. This vision of time challenges the capitalist mantra, which 'arrests the flows of becoming, freezes the rhizomatic propensity for multiple connections and expropriates nomadic intensities through quantitative build-ups of the acquired commodities' (Braidotti 2006: 152). Indeed, Zorbitality engages with the 'reorganization of the entire time structure of subjectivity' that Braidotti (*ibid*: 153) describes, through its traversal of different epochs: the historical and lived past, the dynamic present and expectant future. Secondly, this thesis seeks to challenge the idea that linear time is associated with masculinity, and cyclic time with femininity. Finally, it critiques the sameness of Western culture, where an increasing multiculturalism is being subsumed by capitalism. It does so by focusing on the rhythmic ingenuity of Afro-diasporic rhythms and the Caribbean as a site of hybridity, which challenges a linear conception of time (Benítez-Rojo 1996; Glissant 1997).

Equally important to this thesis is the concept of space, which Massey (1994: 3) describes as 'an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification.' Travelling across space and time is evidenced in my thesis through narratives of

leave and return, embodied in the interweaving of different sociohistorical genealogies, alternative genealogies of literature, dance and Zumba, and my personal narrative. Also central are the lived experiences of various women, and especially the moments where their subjectivities could be said to be dancing on the edge of time. These transformative moments evoke Amerindian conceptions of time and space, as described by Guardiola-Rivera (2010: 31), where natural phenomena ‘were interconnected and continuous in time and space’ and life was characterised by ‘an intensified flow of material and spiritual exchanges that sharply contrasts with the deprivation and exile that characterises our materialistic and opportunistic culture.’ Thus, Zorbital analysis advocates a collective-oriented conception, that focuses on a sustainable long-term rather than a materialistic short-term.

This thesis also works with Ahmed’s (2006) queer phenomenology, which asserts that sexual orientation is defined through moments where we experience a shifting relationship with space. As Halberstam (2005: 6) asserts, queer ‘refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.’ Zorbital analysis references Halberstam’s (*ibid*: 1) concepts of queer time and space, which develop alternative lineages to ‘the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction,’ through transformative fleeting moments, which open up new possibilities for relationship formations. Drawing on queer time and space would have particular benefits for women, since the ‘biological clock’ (*ibid*: 5) would no longer hold sway. Rather, possibilities for alternative subjectivities, based in bodily and political movement, would be offered. Furthermore, this shift would enable us ‘to introduce questions of sexuality and space into the more general conversations about globalization and transnational capitalism’ (*ibid*), which this thesis achieves by drawing on Zumba Fitness as a central example of a joyous libidinal economy grounded in capitalism’s possibilities.

Finally, ‘the Zorbital’ views memory as a central process. As Erll (2011: 4) asserts, formal studies of memory can be divided into three amorphous phases, beginning from the late nineteenth century. Early writings on memory asserted

that it was an inner process. In his (1962 [1896]) work on repressed memory, Freud contended that we unconsciously block memories of traumatic events, although these may still have an impact on our everyday experiences. Thus, trauma was one of the main roots of early memory studies. Simultaneously, experimental studies of memory as a cognitive process emerged (see Ebbinghaus 1913 [1885]). In contrast to these individualistic views, in *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs (1992 [1925]) conceptualised collective frameworks of memory, arguing that individual and collective memory cannot be separated. However, in the first half of the twentieth century, memory was largely seen as the cognitive recall of past events. Indeed, the term 'memory' became subordinated to 'remembering' (Lee Klein 2000: 131).

The second phase gained momentum in the late 1980s. This was influenced by the emergence of: women's autobiographical writing (see Grimley Mason and Hurd Green 1979), family genealogies and life histories of working class people (see Clark 1979), memory studies as a method of collectively exploring the roots of women's oppression (Haug 1987), anti-historicist models such as poststructuralism (Jameson 1984) and the narratives of Jewish survivors of the Nazi Holocaust (Yerushalmi 1982; Nora 1989 [1984]; *Shoah* 1985). In relation to feminist memory,¹⁶ as Reading (2014: 200) notes, a gradual awareness developed amongst women that '... collective memories can oppress women but also could be used as a form of women's liberation and for creating a more equal world.' Cultural memory also emerged as a resource for examining 'the meanings, silences and tropes' (*ibid*: 201) surrounding the representation of women and how these create 'social and cultural relations through our consumption and cultural memory of them' (*ibid*). Furthermore, feminists in the 1970s and 1980s utilised psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to examine how gender is constituted through recollection and trauma (see Chodorow 1978). These explorations resonated with the simultaneous emergence of Jewish narratives of victimisation, where memory began to be

¹⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft's (1985 [1792]) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was one of the founding texts of feminist memory studies. Wollstonecraft argued that the social inheritance of religion was oppressive for women and asserted that women should study history to gain partial liberation. However, her elitist model privileged educated middle class women.

seen as 'a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse' (Lee Klein 2000: 145). Yet, unfortunately the work of women that has explicitly addressed the question of gender in memory studies has often been subordinated to matters of traumatic memory and national identity (Reading 2014: 196).

Since the 1980s, 'memory studies' has gained strength as an interdisciplinary field, thus beginning the third phase. Furthermore, from the early 2000s, memory scholars have increasingly begun to examine how memory is mediated by emergent digital culture and globalization, which offer new possibilities for viewing memory as a fluid process (Rothberg 2009; Erll 2011; Hoskins 2011; Reading 2016). Rothberg's (2009) concept of multidirectional memory shows how seemingly separate histories are intertwined, by examining the links between Holocaust and postcolonial studies. He shows how decolonisation and demands for civil rights in the Caribbean, amongst other places, had an impact on memory of the Holocaust as a Western site of trauma. He characterises multidirectional memory as a 'productive, intercultural dynamic' (*ibid*: 3) and rejects the assumption that 'a straight line runs from memory to identity and that the only kinds of memories and identities that are therefore possible are ones that exclude elements of alterity and forms of commonality with others' (*ibid*: 4-5). Since the emergent concept of Zorbitality embodies an ethical openness to otherness and considers Latin America as a locus for its resistant imaginary, Rothberg's theory holds considerable valence.

Erll's (2011) concept of travelling memory further argues that we need to examine the aspects of memory that unite us across national boundaries. Indeed, Erll highlights how the nation state paradigm limits a possible engagement with personal memories and multiculturalism. Furthermore, Erll highlights the value of an active exchange between individuals and the media within specific local contexts, mediated by globalisation and digital culture. This is further navigated in Hoskins's (2011) work on the connective turn in memory studies and Reading's (2016) work on global memory. Hoskins (2011) examines how developments in media and technology went together with the growth of memory studies. Rather than highlighting the transcultural dialogues

that Erll (2011) suggests, Hoskins (2011: 21) rather explores 'the media-technological architecture of memory that already challenges such distinctions.' Through mediated memory a 'new media ecology' (*ibid*: 23) is developing, whereby the divisions between artificial intelligence and human memory are being eroded.

Reading (2016) extends Hoskins's work through a nuanced exploration of how globalised digital cultures and technologies such as social media, smart phones and the internet are changing the way we view memory, especially in relation to gender. She argues that movement is central to this process, both in terms of an emergent concept and methodology: global memory. Reading's work is influential for the textured methodological work of this thesis, as she explores global memory in relation to a wide range of sources, including utopian literature and women's use of mobile phones to capture family memories. Reading (*ibid*: 56-57) puts forward six dynamic models of the global memory field. Each highlights a different movement configuration: (trans)mediality, (trans)modality, extensity, velocity, valency and viscosity. The emergent concept of Zorbitality seeks to extend Reading's vision by asserting that female (a)sexualities offer diverse configurations and may shift across our life spans.

This thesis contends that memory is an embodied process of becoming. The emergent concept of Zorbitality recognises that digital culture offers new possibilities for developing global communities, whilst seeking to address the increasingly disembodied nature of twenty-first century memory. Zorbitality thus views memory as a collective embodied performance, as in Ancient Greek culture. Zorbitality also references Braidotti's (2006) concept of nomadic remembering, which draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) work on majority and minority memory. As Braidotti (*ibid*: 168) notes: 'When you remember in the intensive or minority-mode, you open up spaces of movement and of deterritorialization which actualize virtual possibilities which had been frozen in the image of the past.' In this vision, memory is viewed as a creative process, which celebrates the positivity of difference and eschews the psychoanalytic focus on a repressed past. As Braidotti (*ibid*) notes, memory is

transformed from vulnerability to empowerment. Trauma creates a generative possibility. The self can be reinvented in a discontinuous way, which challenges the patriarchal order: 'Remembering in this nomadic mode is the active reinvention of a self that is joyfully discontinuous, as opposed to being mournfully consistent, as programmed by phallogocentric culture' (*ibid*: 169).

Finally, my approach integrates Brown and Reavey's (2015) work on vital memory, which seeks to develop 'an enhanced understanding of memory as a context-bound, fluid, ethical and affective practice' (Brown and Reavey 2015: xiv). Vital memories are memories that are 'difficult, irreversible, that create deep marks in the ongoing flow of experience' (*ibid*: xiii). They are influenced by our relationships with 'human and non-human elements,' which create a person's 'life-space' (*ibid*). Vital memories offer possibilities for continually rewriting our experiences, since they blur the boundaries between 'the collective and the individual, the individual and the setting, the emotional and the rational' (*ibid*). Memory is thus an all-encompassing practice, where agency emerges as an ambivalent principle, which can be reworked by reimagining the past through alternative affective modes. Similarly, this thesis acknowledges vulnerability, yet looks to empowering moments, where Zorbitality is encountered in collective ecstatic rites. Having explored what Zorbitality and Zorbital analysis entail, I will now describe my methodology.

1.4 - Methodology

This thesis draws on three methodologies: rhizomatic genealogy (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980];¹⁷ Anzaldúa 1999), me-search (Nguyen 2015) and collective biography (Davies and Gannon 2006). My first methodology references Foucault's (1993, 1998) genealogical approach, which provides a complex history of contemporary subjectivities whilst not assuming a fixed human essence underlying historical transformation. Yet, the genealogical exploration I undertake speaks more to Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980])

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1980]: 12) describe the rhizome as an 'antigenealogy' because of its non-linear nature.

rhizomatic structures, which are characterised by multi-directional points. Furthermore, whereas Foucault's genealogies are linear, my genealogies are multiple and overlapping. Since Latin America is the locus for my theorisations, my work is most aligned with Anzaldúa's (1999) *Borderlands*, where she seeks to restructure the way we study history, by drawing on the concept of *autohistoria*. *Autohistoria* highlights the historical transformation of genealogies: sociocultural, personal and collective. Anzaldúa draws on her personal narrative, articulated in three languages (English, Spanish and Nahuatl¹⁸) to highlight her displacement as a Chicana lesbian. She achieves this by engaging in performative writing and drawing on her grandmother's narrative, thus highlighting how history is not univocal. The text features the interweaving of *corridos*, songs that critique male dominance in Mexican culture. Anzaldúa 'presents history as a serpentine cycle rather than a linear narrative (Saldívar-Hull 1999: 2). Furthermore, her genealogy represents 'the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life' (Anzaldúa 1999: 57). She transforms her legacy of displacement by drawing on indigenous icons, traditions and rituals that also seek to replace the Catholic customs of Cortés's conquest of Mexico.¹⁹ Instead of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a dominant Catholic icon in Mexico, Anzaldúa draws on Coatlicue, the Aztec serpent goddess, thus celebrating a lineage often forgotten in the study of Mexican identity.²⁰

Anzaldúa's transformation of history was influential for my genealogical approach, which comprises two parts. The first analyses psychological and sociological representations of asexuality; critiques the categories of sex, gender and sexuality, by drawing on the figure of the hermaphrodite; and engages in a genealogy of female (a)sexualities, staged through stock characters who act as cultural referents of the female 'asexual': the nineteenth-century frigid woman and the single woman of postfeminist culture. The second part offers alternative genealogies, by firstly engaging with literary representations of

¹⁸ Nahuatl is one of many ancient Aztec languages.

¹⁹ This resonates with my reconfiguration of Katherine's memory through Mexican *conchero* (indigenous Aztec) dance in section 5.2 (see pp. 197-199).

²⁰ Coatlicue will reappear in my me-search. See section 4.1 (p. 139).

female (a)sexualities ('The Zorbital Literary Imaginary'). Secondly, it reconfigures Stravinsky's (1913) ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, where a young virgin dances herself to death, by drawing on Katherine Dunham's *Rites de Passage* (1941), which is a choreographic invocation of a West African collective danced rite. Dunham, an anthropologist and dancer, is a significant figure in my explorations. Like me, she discovered herself in the Afro-diasporic rhythms of the Caribbean, during her fieldwork.²¹ Thirdly, I engage with the collective ecstasy evident in the tradition of Dionysus, the mythical asexual god of collective ecstasy. Subsequently, I show how the rise of Christianity and modern warfare in Europe suppressed his legacy, which also has a conceptual connection with the colonisers' devaluation of the collective ecstatic traditions of indigenous peoples and African slaves in the 'New' World. Finally, I engage in a genealogy of Zumba as a twenty-first century collective movement rite mediated by globalisation and capitalism. I argue that Zumba can be seen as a return to Dionysus and the collective ecstatic traditions of African dance prior to colonisation. Ultimately, this genealogy seeks to expose the power regimes that shape the lived experiences of female (a)sexualities, whilst offering an alternative conception, Zorbitality, articulated through the internalisation of collective ecstasy.

Inspired by Butchart's (1998) work, I draw on genealogy to stage a postcolonial encounter, specifically with the African body. As Macleod and Bhatia (2008: 585) assert, Butchart drew on a genealogy of the black African body from the Renaissance to the 1990s: 'to overcome the difficulties of the myth of origin in which a particular time is reified and particular understandings of experiences, mentality and subjectivity are essentialized.' He thus sought to show that there is no original black African body distorted by the 'classificatory gaze' of Western colonisers (Butchart 1998: 51). My encounter with the 'African' body serves to highlight how the Western colonisers of the 'New' World suppressed the collective traditions of indigenous and West African peoples and gradually naturalised the dyad as the basic configuration of Latin social dance. This

²¹ See Autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (pp. 154-162) for more on the Caribbean as a site of my personal transformation.

colonial strategy devalued the specific configuration of solo dance within a collective (Ehrenreich 2007).²² I relate my encounter with the non-essentialised African body to my study of female (a)sexualities, since I seek to deconstruct the term 'asexual,' highlighting that there is no female 'asexual' to be uncovered. Furthermore, I highlight the asexual nature of collective danced rites, whilst demonstrating their life-giving possibilities. This genealogy thus speaks to the potentiality of postcolonial scholarship, which 'offers the potential of deconstructing the "centre" as the normalized present and foregrounding the "periphery" or the absent trace, while at the same time avoiding the search for the myth of origin' (Macleod and Bhatia 2008: 587). Zorbitality, with its focus on ecstatic movement, transforms history both in its level of critique and its propagation of various interlocking - or one could say, dancing - genealogies. Yet, it does so in a way that seeks not to romanticise the subjects it speaks of.

The second methodology I draw on is Nguyen's (2015: 469) 'me-search,' which acknowledges 'the intimacy between myself as subject and the subject of my scholarly work.' I equally espouse Spry's (2001) account of performing ethnography, by addressing her critique of the academy's disembodied approach to scholarship, and aiming to highlight 'the body as a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy' (Spry 2001: 706). I recognise that me-search is closely linked to autoethnography, 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 739), which also has a strong lineage within feminist scholarship (see Stanley 1992). Yet, 'me-search' captures the concept of Zorbitality more clearly, for it demonstrates how the research process *itself* can transform the researcher. Weaving poetic language and critical self-reflexivity, this thesis aims to dance around the linearity of academic prose and to enable the elaboration of a 'migratory identity' (2001: 727). Indeed, dance as a metaphor for an alternative vision of female (a)sexualities is key to Zorbitality. I am influenced by Cixous and Clément's (1986) concept of the feminine libidinal economy, which highlights the life-

²² This point will be central to Martha's memory in section 6.3 (see pp. 246-254).

affirming and creative potential of the moving female body in thwarting the death drive of patriarchal structures. It is hoped that the sense of movement evoked within the writing will lead to what Spry (2001: 721) refers to as 'open agency,' an emerging voice unfettered by patriarchal constraints. This approach is particularly pertinent when considering the narrative of the female 'asexual,' which has been reduced to stereotypes of frigidity and chasteness within popular, queer and feminist discourses, due to an overt sex-positivity (Cerankowski and Milks 2014).

Throughout my thesis, I will stress the absence of the embodied self in genealogical and poststructuralist scholarship (see Foucault 1993; Butler 1997). Equally, I will highlight silences and ambivalences in my account, demonstrating the inadequacy of identity categories in fully capturing one's subjectivity. Drawing on Cavarero's (2000 [1997]) criticism of the subject/ individual demarcation in Butler's (1993) work, I will utilise my self-narrative as a method of charting the idiosyncrasy and relating strands of life histories, highlighting their power in *suspending* the disjunctures between discursive representations and lived experiences. I take inspiration from: (i) Denzin's (1997) interpretive ethnography, which views self-narratives as sources of ethical inquiry, (ii) Cixous's (1976 [1975]) writing, which retains femininity whilst not stressing biological sexual difference, (iii) Derrida's (1978 [1967]) deconstruction, which plays with words/ silences and challenges absolute truths, (iv) Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) rhizomatic structures, characterised by flows of intensity and (v) Braidotti's (2006) 'nomadic subjectivity,' which continually emphasises a sustainable process of becoming.

The final methodology I use is collective biography, defined as 'a coproduced, intertwined, reflexive biography, working with memory and storytelling' (Denzin 2014: 23). Davies and Gannon (2006) developed this method by extending Frigga Haug's (1987) memory work. Haug was inspired by Marxism, and drew on women's stories as a means of examining the social structures

underpinning gender inequality.²³ She theorised from *experience* and made the researcher an intricate part of the research process. She highlighted how a major obstacle in making sense of our experience lies in viewing our lives as linear biographies (Stephenson and Kippax 2008). Collective biography extends Haug's work, by entirely challenging the view of the unitary subject. Collective biography addresses my research questions, as it foregrounds the discourses that are formative in women's recognition of themselves as sexual subjects. Equally, it highlights how our narratives are inter-related, whilst focusing on the embodied details of memories. Ultimately, this method highlights the temporal aspects of female (a)sexualities, offsetting both the trans-historical genealogy and my self-narrative spanning past and present.²⁴

I engaged in two sets of collective biography workshops with nine women (one group of four and one group of five), based in the UK. In addition to these sessions, I conducted individual life history interviews with another seven women, due to scheduling difficulties. Since collective biography sessions normally take place over months/years, I adapted this to suit the time constraints of my research. Women (including male to female transsexuals) of a range of ethnicities and classes were recruited through word of mouth, Internet forums (e.g. – AVEN [The Asexual Visibility and Education Network], Gingerbeer), recruitment posters and social networking sites. Once any potential participants responded, I sent them a general information questionnaire, which collected some general demographics, so that I could recruit as broad a range of people as possible. These questionnaires were

²³ Subsequent memory work explored, for example: the gendered construction of emotions (Crawford et al. 1992); the limited roles offered to young women in public life (Boucher 1997) and the shadow cast by fathers' patriarchal attitudes in a group of pro-feminist men (Pease 2000).

²⁴ Collective biography reminds me of Divas' (1993) dance production of *No Man's Land*, which featured 18 women, aged between 9 and 60, and incorporated 12 short dances, vignettes of personal memories, group ensemble work, solos and duets. Women of various ethnicities, classes, ages and sexualities featured. In one dance, the women engage in a slow and dignified passing of eggs, emphasising the role of touch, shared space and a combined sense of loss and growth in the maturation process. The 'Kissing Dance,' which features two women engaging in an extended kiss, alludes to Irigaray's work (1985 [1977]) work, which highlights the always-touching lips of the labia as a site of sexual pleasure, and connectedness amongst women. See Brown's (2006: 10-11) discussion of this work.

treated within the terms of the 1998 Data Protection Act. The participants also signed a general consent form.

As this research holds Latin America as a locus, and seeks to interrogate Western colonial history, I was pleased that one woman born on the African continent, one British-Caribbean and one Indian woman were part of my research. One woman from Japan, women from European countries other than Britain, and a number of white British women also participated. I wished not to overdetermine sexual orientation, yet wanted the voices of asexual-identified women to be heard, and thus I sought for half of the women recruited to be asexual-identified. In reality, this task was not easy, even having put advertisements on AVEN. In total, three of my respondents were asexual-identified and emailed me having seen the call for participants on University websites and gender/sexuality forums. Three other women had strong resonances with asexuality, and many of the other women had experienced periods of their lives where they identified with asexuality. Kali, for instance, stated that she had been 'asexual' for most of her life, although she identified overall as heterosexual, since she was more attracted to men than women. Isadora, meanwhile, spent three years in a silent order, while Scarlett identified as polyamorous, not always with a sexual dimension.

As women's engagements with (a)sexualities throughout their lives were central, I wished for half of the participants to be aged 40+, and for the remaining participants to be of various ages. In reality, it was hard to find older respondents, even having reassessed my recruitment strategies (using more non-digital avenues). Yet, I still managed to recruit one woman in her 40s, two women in their 50s, one woman in her 60s and one in her 70s. Once my respondents had been recruited, I set up a doodle poll to arrange dates for the workshops. By chance, half of the first group were asexual-identified, whereas all the women in the second group were currently or had been in same-sex relationships.

The workshops/interviews were recorded with a tape recorder. The data was transcribed and stored securely to ensure confidentiality. I sought to preserve anonymity by giving each woman a pseudonym pertaining to a famous female ballet character, dancer or choreographer from the nineteenth century until the present, unless the participants asked for a particular pseudonym.²⁵ Each workshop/interview was based around four specific memories (two in each session), which my respondents wrote about in advance. These were:

1. My first memory of being recognised as an adult woman
2. A memory of ambivalence (from any part of my life) related to being recognised as female.
3. A memory where I stayed silent when I longed to speak up against a threat to my gender/ sexuality *or*
A memory where I spoke up against a threat to my gender/ sexuality.
4. A memory where I felt completely free within my body

These memories enabled a discussion of particular rites of passage, as well as embodied moments in which transformation occurred. The respondents were instructed to write the memories in 250-500 words approximately, so as not to be too long, whilst allowing for detail. They were encouraged not to analyse the memories but rather to describe them in as much visceral detail as possible (i.e. – what sights, smells, sounds, tastes, feelings and sensations they experienced at the time these were happening). This addresses the issue Brown et al. (2011: 501) raised in their research: ‘... we rapidly found ourselves trying to generalize and impose a common framework on the memories, based on commonsense notions, rather than attempt to excavate the specificity and particularity of each

²⁵ Scarlett and Johanna specifically asked for these pseudonyms. The others correspond to the following ballet characters/dancers/choreographers: Anna (the prima ballerina, Anna Pavlova), Giselle (the main character of Adam’s ballet, *Giselle*), Isadora (Isadora Duncan, twentieth-century dancer/choreographer), Kali (the dancing Indian goddess), Kitri (a ballet character from *Don Quixote*), Katherine (Katherine Dunham, the African-American dancer who conducted anthropological fieldwork in the Caribbean), Laverne (Laverne Cox, the twenty-first century transgender dancer), Margot (Margot Fonteyn, prima ballerina), Martha (Martha Graham, twentieth-century legend), Ruth (Ruth St. Denis, an early twentieth-century dancer), Sasha (Sasha Waltz, twenty-first century choreographer) and Titania (ballet character from Balanchine’s [1962] choreography for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* [Shakespeare 1590 – play; Mendelssohn 1842 – musical score]).

memory.’ Thus, I sought to enable my respondents to focus on their embodiment in the research process and to use the group process to navigate their experiences.

Although the memories in collective biography work can be written in first or third person (see Davies and Gannon 2006), I asked my respondents to use third person. Like Haug (1987), I chose this as a distancing tool, since writing and reading aloud painful memories can be emotionally distressing. In their chapter on memory work, Stephenson and Kippax (2008: 132) justify the use of the third person: ‘It is an invitation to co-researchers to observe aspects of themselves. It can release people from their tendencies towards self-justification, performing coherent selves, facilitating the emergence of details which appear incoherent or meaningless from normative perspectives.’ Equally, I wanted my respondents to be able to look back on their past selves with compassion. Yet, many of my respondents found this process strange:

Giselle: It’s weird because it’s written in this third person... And so reading it with the third person feels even weirder because it sounds like a fiction story... (Collective biography: session 1, group 1, 26/04/2015)

*

Kitri: I just wanted to keep changing it to ‘I’ and ‘me.’ (Collective biography: session 1, group 1, 26/04/2015)

*

Anna: I think it was quite weird doing it in kind of a third person thing. (Life history interview, 04/05/2015)

*

Margot: By the way, writing it in the third person is so strange! *[laughs]* (Life history interview, 26/05/2015)

Yet, Martha felt a sense of compassion and catharsis, which is what I had been aiming for.

Martha: I think the writing it as a ‘she’... I was like: ‘that’s a bit weird, isn’t it?!’ But then I started typing it... And then for the first time I actually felt compassion for the story rather than it being just this thing... that happened... ‘cause it was removed from me... Yeah, and it was really powerful actually. (Life history interview, 08/06/2015)

After the first session, some members of group two had quite a strong emotional reaction to what they had discussed. This reaction could have been related to the ethical issues Stephenson and Kippax (2008) identify with memory work: the difficulty of narrating experience whilst trying to transcend rigid ways of thinking about it. In order to create a safe shared space, I invited my respondents to go for lunch before the second session. I had initially wanted to do a meet-up for the members of each group before the workshops started. However, this proved difficult to organise. Yet, I am glad that I addressed the emotional concerns of my participants as I realise that the groups were a very 'fast to get to know you' experience!

In completing the thesis, I chose memories that embody movement, transformation and dance, in order to frame my analysis. Furthermore, I drew on a performative element by reconfiguring my respondents' memories through alternative Latin American dance narratives,²⁶ thus invoking the historical transformation of Latin America as a resistant imaginary. This method resonates with recent developments in Western social science methodology, which highlight the role of the imagination in the process of remembering (Keightley and Pickering 2013) and utopia as method (Levitas 2013). Furthermore, it evokes the multifaceted lineage of Latin American literature, which reaches its epitome in marvellous realism (see Carpentier 1995 [1949]). This would later become known as 'magical realism' following Flores's (1955) seminal essay. Magical realism seeks to transcend social, geographical and political boundaries, by making magic and transformation central to the process of writing.²⁷ As Parkinson Zamora and Faris (1995) note, as a fictional genre, it

²⁶ See, for example, Katherine's memory in section 5.2 (pp. 192-199).

²⁷ Magical realism is a term that was first applied to Western Expressionist Art (see Roh 1925). However, it reached its strongest manifestation as a Latin American literary genre (see Flores 1955). Magical realism emerged from Carpentier's (1995 [1949]) idea of *lo real maravilloso*, which highlighted how irony naturally exists within Latin American culture, with its innate blend of cultures and traditions, multi-faceted geography and fractured history, which seem fictional to an outsider. As D'haen (1995) notes, magical realism is related to postmodernism, in its destabilisation of assumed truths. Interestingly, although postmodernism is strongly allied with the Western world, as a term it emerged in the *Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana* (1961 [1934]) of the Spanish/ Puerto Rican scholar, Federico de Onís. I reference magical realism rather than postmodernism here, for I agree with D'haen (1995: 200) that magical realism offers a less imposed decentring, since it is situated within the organically fractured history of Latin America.

is particularly useful for women's writing and postcolonial writing, since it offers a strategy for reworking various colonisations. In essence, alternative futures evoked by the imagination enable a rewriting of personal memories and historical events. Due to time constraints, I was unable to ask my respondents to rewrite their memories as part of the collective biography process. Therefore, I saw my imaginative rewriting of their memories in terms of resistance as an important element of my analysis.²⁸

Whilst the memories were the foundation of the workshops, photo-production methods were incorporated into the second session, whereby participants captured up to 15 photographs (as suggested by Johnson 2011) of 'spaces/places, objects and people that make me aware of my sexuality,' using their smart phone, or a disposable camera provided by me, if they did not have one).²⁹ Following photovoice protocol (Wang and Burris 1997), the participants chose three photographs for group discussion, before private discussion with me in a follow-up interview. Photo-production can potentially enable rich accounts to emerge, which may elude verbal description (Reavey and Johnson 2008). It has previously been used in explorations of: women's embodiment of pleasure (del Busso 2011), bisexual spaces (Bowes-Catton, Barker and Richards 2011) and LGBT mental health (Johnson 2011). Del Busso (2011: 43) demonstrated how photo-production succeeds in tapping into 'the felt and sensed spatial and temporal aspects of being-in-the-world.' Thus, it allowed her women respondents to rethink their lived experiences in relation to wider socio-political dynamics. However, in my study, the visual images played less of a role than initially thought. The more interesting accounts came from my respondents' memories. This may perhaps speak of patriarchal culture, where the primacy of the visual is overbearing in defining women's bodily experiences *for* them. Thus, my respondents may have wanted to go beyond the visual realm in narrating their individual trajectories. My respondents' lack of

²⁸ See section 6.1 (pp. 226-238), where I draw on my respondents' memories of collective ecstatic motion to re-evaluate the history of the indigenous Pre-Columbian subject.

²⁹ In her initial memory work, Haug (1987) did not just call for the writing and analysis of women's memories, but also a visual analysis of images of women's bodies.

engagement with the visual may also relate to the usage of photography rather than created images. As Gillies et al. (2005) highlighted, by painting images within the research process, their participants partially transcended mind/body dualism. Yet, photography may not afford such possibilities, since it is created instantly rather than through an embodied process.

As visual research methods have ethical implications, each woman was asked to sign a visual consent form with three options for images featuring them: to appear in publications (i) unaltered, (ii) with features blurred or (iii) not at all. Analysis of the photographs endorsed a phenomenological stance, whereby participants engaged with how the images related to their lived experiences. Each woman in the collective biography group engaged in an individual follow-up interview with me, inspired by Wengraf's Biographical-Narrative Interpretive Method (2001), in which they could also raise any concerns. The interview was analysed using Braun and Clark's (2006) Thematic Analytic technique, which involved a close reading of transcripts, identification of common themes and cross-photo comparison. For the life history interviews, the structure of the collective biography groups was adapted. The first half of the interview comprised the follow-up interview questions and the second half the discussion of the four memories. Participants in the life history interviews did not have to take images, as I felt that the group discussion was vital for this exercise.

Finally, sexuality research has ethical implications. Firstly, the issue of secrecy and silence in the research process (see Ryan-Flood and Gill 2010) played a part. In some interviews I did not disclose my loose identification with asexuality. If I sensed that the participant did not quite 'get' asexuality, I did this to protect myself. Yet, when my participants were intrigued about the finer details of my project, I disclosed this information, as I felt we had built sufficient trust. Secondly, since sexuality is a sensitive area, and group work has the potential to 'raise strong feelings and opinions, or to pose a threat to those involved, whether researchers or participants' (Farquhar and Das 1999: 48-49), my research was concerned not only with procedural ethics (issues of

anonymity, consent and confidentiality) but also with what Ellis (2007) terms 'relational ethics.' As Ellis (*ibid*: 4) narrates: 'Relational ethics recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched... As part of relational ethics, we seek to deal with the reality and practice of changing relationships with our research participants.' Thus, if further projects emerge out of the data produced (for example: a play), the participants will be contacted again to ensure that they still consent to their contributions being used. Having described the methodology for this thesis, I will now sketch the structure of the text.

1.5 - Zorbital formations: Structure of the text

The structure of the thesis is Zorbital, as it is characterised by multiple genealogies, which weave in a non-linear fashion. It is written in three parts, each of which is based on one of my three methodologies: sociohistorical genealogy (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]; Anzaldúa 1999), me-search (Nguyen 2015) and collective biography (Davies and Gannon 2006). Initially I had thought that these methodologies were going to interweave more, but for the sake of clarity I decided to prescribe one method per part, whilst highlighting their thematic connections through footnotes, which also provide sociohistorical context for the narratives I describe.

Part I is a literature review, which draws on two genealogies, the first being a sociohistorical genealogy of female (a)sexualities (chapter 2) and the second being an alternative genealogy comprising alternative configurations of female (a)sexualities in literature, dance and Zumba (chapter 3). Chapter 2 firstly critiques empirical psychological and sociological representations of asexuality (section 2.1). I argue that the narrow definition of asexuality as a 'lack' of sexual attraction (Bogaert 2004: 279; AVEN 2016) obscures underlying discursive strategies within empirical psychological research (see Chasin 2014), notably that: (a) being sexual is universal and (b) heterosexuality is the ideal model. However, more ethical and culturally sensitive methodologies are offered in the realm of cultural psychology (see Valsiner 2012). I also highlight how

sociological accounts offer more nuanced evaluations of the lived experiences of female (a)sexualities, but there is a need to extend Cerankowski and Milks's (2014) work, which began to examine how feminist and queer discourses may become more inclusive of (a)sexualities. Indeed, as I will argue, collective ecstatic motion, in a political and a physical sense, needs to be the basis of a future queer politics.

Section 2.2 deconstructs the categories of: (i) sex, (ii) gender and (iii) sexuality. In relation to sex, I highlight the shift from the one-sex to two-sex model in the nineteenth century (see Laqueur 1990), through the story of the nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin (Foucault 1980), who committed suicide as the result of the search for the 'truth' of sex. In relation to gender, I highlight how sex and gender only became distinct categories through Stoller's (1968) research on transsexualism. In relation to sexuality, I draw on Van Anders's (2015) Sexual Configurations Theory to work towards a Zorbital theory of (a)sexualities. I also re-evaluate the role of ecstasy in sexuality, by highlighting the forgotten strand of female autoeroticism. Section 2.3 provides a genealogy of the female 'asexual' through the stock characters of the nineteenth/ twentieth century frigid woman (Cryle and Moore 2011; Kim 2014) and single woman of postfeminist culture (Taylor 2011). Their lineages are contextualised by examining changing political inclinations within the feminist movement, in particular the troubled shift from second to third wave feminism and postfeminist culture (see Gamble 2001; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Budgeon 2009; Gill and Scharff 2011).

Chapter 3 begins with an examination of 'the Zorbital Literary Imaginary' (section 3.1). I draw on two novels, Virginia Woolf's (2009 [1915]) *The Voyage Out* and Marge Piercy's (1979 [1976]) *Woman on the Edge of Time*, to work towards a Zorbital framework of analysis. These novels are linked through: (i) asexual-identified women, (ii) voyages to and from Latin America and (iii) transformative danced scenes. Throughout my analysis, I focus on scenes of collective ecstatic motion, which are central to reconfiguring (a)sexualities within a Zorbital framework. Section 3.2 navigates the history of dance. It

begins with an analysis of Stravinsky's twentieth-century ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1913), which features a young 'virgin' who is chosen by the male elders of her community and dances herself to death for the god of Spring. This is an interesting work to begin thinking about the dominant cultural image of the woman 'dancing herself to death,' as well as querying the connection between sexuality and the collective. I seek to reconfigure the work through *Rites de Passage* (1941), a dance work created by the African American dancer and anthropologist, Katherine Dunham, which features a collective West African danced rite. Countering the pathologising narratives surrounding the frigid and the single woman in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I wish to show how *real* women were dancing themselves to life at that time. This section finishes with an overview of the existential phenomenology of dance (see Fraleigh 1987), a practical tool for working towards a Zorbital framework for female (a)sexualities.

Section 3.3 provides a micro-genealogy of Zumba, by exploring the gradual suppression of Dionysian rites, especially during European conquest of Latin America in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Section 3.4 expands this by drawing on the collective ecstasy of the lived Zumba experience. I firstly provide a more nuanced definition of Zorbitality, via Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) theory of 'flow' and Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) 'rhizome.' Secondly, I explore Zumba as a Dionysian rite, mediated by digital culture and the transmigration of Afro-Caribbean culture to the United States, via capitalism and globalisation, by drawing on the narrative of its founder, Beto Pérez. Finally, I examine the tension between Zumba as a capitalist enterprise and the collective joy of the lived Zumba experience, through personal insights from the Zumba Instructor Network Academy and Believe after-party (London, July 2015), and work as a Zumba Fitness instructor. In a Zorbital move, this presages my me-search in chapter 4. I conceptualise Zumba as: (i) an asexual space, (ii) a celebration of the autoerotic body and (iii) an invocation of West African collective danced rites. I argue that although Zumba could be accused of the cultural appropriation of the African body, through its deconstruction of the seeming naturalness of the dyad in Latin social dance it succeeds in invoking the

specific configuration of West African dance - solo dance within a collective - which may be drawn upon as a resistant imaginary.

Part II draws on me-search, which navigates my personal journey with regards to (a)sexuality. In Chapter 4, I focus on the threefold process underpinning Zorbitality, which, as I have previously described, moves from vulnerability to inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. I draw on nine key autobiographical passages from my trajectory to navigate this process, weaving theory and embodied experience. These move from scenes of physical stasis and my arrival at asexuality as an identity marker (passages one to three), to scenes where my subjectivity danced (passages four and five). Following this, I navigate scenes that emphasise movement (passages six and seven) and the internalisation of collective ecstatic motion as a resistant imaginary (passage nine). This chapter also serves to highlight how the research process itself has transformed me.

Part III comprises two chapters, which draw on the collective biography groups and life history interviews I conducted. Chapter 5 examines the relationship between the first two Zorbital processes: vulnerability and inner ecstasy. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 deal primarily with vulnerability, while sections 5.3 and 5.4 show how inner ecstasy may be reached through practices where women go beyond the dyad as a starting point of their libidinal lives. In section 5.1, I draw on the accounts of three asexual-identified/queer women, describing how society often reduces asexual-identified individuals to static automatons. Yet, I also show how there was a disjunct between the negative societal view of asexuality and the vital life of my respondents' discovery of asexuality, which was characterised by inner ecstasy. When placed on the stage of Western civilisation, the female 'asexual' becomes an indigenous subject, an inhuman other. Yet, through my reimagining of my respondents' memories through *Marioneta*, a Zumba song about a puppet, I restage my respondents' vulnerabilities through ecstatic motion. In section 5.2, I draw on Katherine's Latin dance floor scene to highlight how women's ecstatic motion is not only constrained within abstract language but also within heteronormative public

spaces. Katherine is forced to resort to violence in order to silence the male perpetrator, a coloniser of sorts. Yet, through my imaginative reworking of Katherine's memory through queer Latino dance floor spaces (Rivera-Servera 2004) and Mexican *conchero* dance (Rostas 1996), I also highlight how more ethical dance floor spaces may be created.

In section 5.3, I show how the reoriented erotic poles of Zorbitality, from autoeroticism to polyamory, were referenced in my respondents' accounts. In relation to autoeroticism, rather than seeing orgasm as a climax of the autoerotic process, I conceptualise it as a peak within a flow. Following this, I examine polyamory as an ethical openness to all, highlighting the enduring role of love in our intimate lives. This works towards Martha's dancing memory from a tantra workshop, which brings together these two poles in a Zorbital synthesis. Finally, in section 5.4, I show how Zorbitality may be reached in transformative moments, where we reach a sense of ecstasy through union with others and the world. I draw on Anna's and Ruth's queer moments, where their subjectivities danced in an ecstatic present. They forgot their origins and saw themselves anew, in locations far from home.

Chapter 6 shows how collective ecstatic motion can be reached. Significantly, this chapter also evokes and reconfigures the genealogies of three central figures to Zorbitality as an emergent concept: the Pre-Columbian indigenous subject, Dionysus, and the African colonial subject in the 'New' World. In section 6.1, I explore how women may achieve bodily autonomy through movement, transformation and choice. I draw on a number of memories where my respondents transgressed what was expected of them in collective movement rites, which were not dance based. Furthermore, through the collective nature of these rites, which invoke Pre-Columbian concepts of space and time, I offer various possible Pre-Columbian journeys to and between Asia. These were evoked through symbols in my respondents' memories: Hindu gods, the dragon boat, the immigration ship, and the war horse. In each case, I explore the relationship between the colonised indigenous subject and the female asexual as an indigenous subject of Western discourse. Yet, I highlight

how collective movement itself allows us to re-imagine colonial history, and to review female (a)sexualities through transformative movement.

In section 6.2, I look back to the suppression of collective ecstasy within the Western tradition, by evoking Dionysus. I show how Dionysian ecstasy was referenced in my respondents' memories of ecstatic dance. Yet, I also seek to question what makes a specific danced rite Zorbital. I draw on Margot's ecstatic clubbing experience and Sasha's experience of a rave in a field whilst she was pregnant. These would seem like embodiments of Dionysian rites. Yet, what is lacking, I argue, is Dionysus's most important feature: the ability to 'transform individual identity' (Seaford 2006: 11), by just imagining his presence. In the latter part of this section, I specifically draw on Martha's trajectory, which resonates with Zorbitality, and reflects the transformative power of Dionysus. Martha is undergoing transformation in her personal and professional lives, largely set in motion by a particular danced scene.

Section 6.3 focuses on the specific scene of Martha's transformation, where she did a solo dance within a collective, whilst naked and vulnerable. I argue that her scene reconfigures two genealogies referenced in this thesis. Firstly, she challenges the sacrificial dance of Stravinsky's (1913) ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, where a young 'virgin' dances herself to death at the service of the god of Spring. Rather, I conceptualise her dance as a dance to life, since it evokes the internalised spirit of Dionysus. I extend this by drawing on the concept of 'collaborative musicing' (Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2009), which destabilises the dyad as the basis of intersubjective relations. Secondly, I assert that she reconfigures the history of the African colonial subject in a postcolonial age. She achieves this through the dance *configuration* evoked in her memory: solo circle dance in a collective. I assert that this has a conceptual relation with West African danced rites, which were devalued by the naturalisation of the couple in Latin social dance since the time of Western colonisation of the 'New' World. I draw on Mbembe's (2002) work on African modes of self-writing to show how Martha both highlights the role of 'self-styling' (Mbembe 2002: 242) in reconfiguring African subjectivity and the female 'asexual' through Zorbitality.

Yet, I do not wish to romanticise either of these subjects. Neither colonial African subject nor the 'asexual' as indigenous subject of Western sexuality discourses are products of sacrifice or liberation. Rather, the personal movement styles we adopt within a web of collective shared movements enable us to reach a resistant imaginary, which speaks to Braidotti's (2006: 33) call for a sustainable nomadic ethics. This is the basis of my thoughts in the final chapter, where I offer various 'Zorbital Flow' diagrams, to navigate the complex and transforming relations between vulnerability, inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion.

Finally, as well as introducing Zorbitality as an emergent concept, the thesis itself is Zorbital. Its overlapping genealogies reconfigure time, space and memory, as does its threefold Zorbital process. The genealogies presented, whether sociohistorical, personal or collective, all share in the joy of ecstatic motion, and a celebration of historical transformation. In this way, the thesis subtly performs a Zorbital process that opens up possible sustainable futures, as well as reflecting a more nuanced relationship with the past. Yet, it is all practiced in an ecstatic present where transformation is enabled. I will now set these thoughts in motion by turning to my first methodology: genealogy.

Part I: Literature Review: Genealogies

Introduction

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978 [1976]), Foucault explores the origins and emergence of sexuality as a historical construct, through a linear genealogy. Whilst Foucault's work is valuable, it fails to examine how women's personal and collective embodied processes can transform genealogies within specific moments across time, and can challenge the linear model of history put forward in Western culture.³⁰ My genealogical approach draws on the history of Latin American dance to create a resistant imaginary, which challenges dominant representations of female (a)sexualities. I achieve this by unearthing the lineage of collective ecstasy, which Western colonisers suppressed during their conquest of the 'New' World. By drawing on Latin America as a site of historical transformation and rhythmic ingenuity (see Benítez-Rojo 1996: 3), I seek to show how genealogies can continually be performed anew, once the boundaries between historical, personal and collective processes are broken down.

My genealogies, which together form an extensive literature review, are comprised of: a sociohistorical genealogy of (a)sexualities and an alternative genealogy articulated through the literary imaginary, Western and Latin American dance and Zumba. The first genealogy critiques: (i) dominant representations of asexuality in empirical psychological and sociological research, (ii) the terms sex, gender and sexuality, and (iii) representations of the female 'asexual,' embodied in the figures of the nineteenth-century frigid woman and the single woman of postfeminist culture. Whilst I realise that there are multiple other approaches I could have critiqued, notably popular cultural representations of (a)sexualities, I chose the ones that require the most reworking. Firstly, the truth claims made by empirical psychologists, which reduce humans to static categories, need to be challenged, especially through the lens of cultural psychology. Furthermore, queer sociological approaches to (a)sexualities offer scope, if the resistant movement they suggest is integrated

³⁰ Foucault began to look to embodied pleasure in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1985 [1984], 1986 [1984]). However, he still failed to examine the specificities of women's narratives.

into an everyday movement politics. Secondly, the terms 'sex,' 'gender' and 'sexuality' require contextualisation, as they are the basic structures that frame our views of asexuality. Finally, the stock characters of the frigid woman and the single woman allow us to consider how perceptions of women's bodies and (a)sexualities have changed, within shifting tides of feminism.

The second genealogy works towards a Zorbital conceptual framework, by offering alternative genealogies, from which the threefold Zorbital process - vulnerability, inner ecstasy, collective ecstatic motion - emerges. These genealogies reflect a personal journey via my childhood interest in creative writing, my role as a Classical musician and recent interest in Afro-diasporic dance. I firstly examine literary representations of female (a)sexualities ('the Zorbital Literary Imaginary'), where the female characters openly challenge the constraints that patriarchy puts on their physical movement. I then explore dance narratives, moving from the woman dancing herself to death in Stravinsky's twentieth-century ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, to a sense of self-generated movement in Katherine Dunham's (1941) *Rites de Passage*. This is contextualised further by examining the suppression of Dionysus's collective ecstatic rites, through the Western conquest of Latin America in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The climax of the alternative genealogy is Zumba, the global Latin dance fitness phenomenon, which I draw on as a central example of Zorbitality. Zumba subverts the logic of neoliberalism and capitalism, whilst cultivating a Dionysian sense of ecstasy for the twenty-first century.

Chapter 2: Representing (a)sexualities

Introduction

... The yearning for rigidity is in us all. It is part of our human condition to long for hard lines and clear concepts. When we have them we have to either face the fact that some realities elude them, or else blind ourselves to the inadequacy of the concepts (Douglas 2003 [1966]: 163).

As Douglas's opening quote highlights, there is a sense of comfort in being able to fit human subjectivity into a box. Yet, in reality, there are a wide variety of human subjectivities, which cannot be fitted into boxed confines. Lived realities often elude representations. Myra T. Johnson (1977) highlighted this in the first chapter ever written about female (a)sexualities, when she argued that the lived realities of asexual and autoerotic women were in danger of being lost within narratives of frigidity or political consciousness. Johnson's concerns are key to the explorations in this chapter, which offer a Zorbital micro-genealogy. I firstly describe the emergence of asexuality as a sexual orientation category in the early years of the twentieth century. I then stage its emergence by deconstructing the concepts of sex, gender and sexuality at their foundational moment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whilst seeking to reconfigure them through transformation and movement. Finally, I examine sociohistorical and sociocultural discourses surrounding female (a)sexualities from the nineteenth century onwards, by focusing on the stock characters of the frigid woman and single woman, whose genealogies will be contextualised within shifting tides of feminism. Origins need to be acknowledged, before being deconstructed and performed anew in chapter three. Thus, let this search for 'origins' commence.

2.1 – Psychological and sociological accounts of asexuality

Empirical Psychology: Claims to a Universal Truth

Early psychological accounts of asexuality were limited, the Kinsey, Martin and Pomeroy reports (1948, 1953) positing a heterosexual/homosexual dyad and ominously labelling those who had little or no sexual desire as Category 'X.' This category seems to correspond to what psychologists now perceive as asexuality. Michael Storms (1980) was the first to label asexuality as one of four distinct

orientations (along with heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality), and to create a continuum of eroticism, asexuality being low in both hetero and homoeroticism. However, he did not account for the social context in which such a term was emerging. The paradigmatic shift from psychodynamic to behavioural approaches in the diagnosis of mental disorders (the shift from DSM II [APA 1968]³¹ to III [APA 1980]) did little to remedy the situation, as explanations that acknowledged psychic life gave way to behavioural approaches. In psychological discourse, asexuality came to be correlated with depression and social withdrawal (Nurius 1983: 128) and viewed as a 'myth' associated with disability (Milligan and Neufeldt 2001: 91). These early explorations did little to advance public awareness of asexuality. 'Asexuality' rather emerged both in the context of an asexual community (AVEN – The Asexual Visibility and Education Network),³² founded by David Jay in 2001, and within psychological research based on general population surveys (Bogaert 2004). Simultaneously, asexuality gained attention within both popular scientific research (Pagan Westphal 2004) and the media (CNN 2004).

Whilst asexuality has not been pathologised in the most recent DSM-5 (APA 2013), it is important to examine the discursive strategies underlying empirical psychological accounts. Firstly, its research accepts asexuality as a category with a set of recognisable features. For instance: Bogaert (2004), the godfather of asexuality, tries to establish correlations between asexuality and gender (more women than men), short stature, lower than average weight, low educational attainment and socioeconomic status, although his hypotheses were not strongly correlated in his data and were contradicted by others. For instance, Prause and Graham (2007) found that asexual-identified people actually had a higher level of educational attainment than people of other sexual orientations. Meanwhile, Yule, Brotto and Gorzalka (2013), sought to establish the neurodevelopmental pathways leading to asexuality, in terms of handedness, birth order and finger length ratio. In a 2015 paper, they extended this by developing a 12-item self-report questionnaire: 'to discriminate between

³¹ DSM refers to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness.

³² AVEN was preceded by the asexual internet group, Haven for the Human Amoeba (2000).

sexual and asexual individuals' (Yule, Brotto and Gorzalka 2015: 148). Indeed, 'discovering' the biological correlates of asexuality seems to be a major obsession for empirical psychologists!

In one of his most recent articles, Bogaert has become more open-minded about how sexuality may shift across the life-course: '...it is best to construe a lack of sexual attraction as an open definition that may fluctuate over time' (Bogaert 2015: 366). There is also a humorous element to his (*ibid*: 374) assertion that 'in a thought experiment, if we view broadly and "deconstruct" sexuality, it can be viewed as a debilitating behavior with cold, even bizarre, rituals and movements.' This viewpoint holds potential, as it highlights how sexuality may shift across the lifespan, and also how sex itself is a bizarre ritual. Yet, in most empirical psychology studies, asexuality is still doggedly characterised as a 'lack' of sexual attraction' (Bogaert 2012: 5), a perspective that has also been adopted by the asexual community. Indeed, through this definition alone, one can see that psychological research accepts the terms of sex and sexuality without critiquing their foundations. This is rendered most problematic in Prause and Harenski's (2014) FMRI³³ study of asexuality. Here they demonstrate a double standard by explicitly stating that separate definitions of asexuality should be endorsed for psychophysiological and qualitative studies. Rather than working with a lack of sexual attraction, they instead rigidly define asexuals in psychophysiological studies as people who report a '*lifelong* history of no felt desire to engage in sexual behaviours' (*ibid*: 41, emphasis added). This behaviourally based definition limits what (a)sexualities can be, summed up in the authors' (*ibid*: 47) final statement: 'Perhaps the biggest challenge is simply how to define an "asexual" given the heterogeneity in the population and impact of this choice on study results.' This is a prime example of what Nikolas Rose (2007: 29) describes as a 'molecular style of thought,' which has come to define the life sciences. Links are created between what we do and who we are, through the evocative means of brain imaging, little room being made for the nuances of one's lived reality.

³³ FMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is a neuroimaging technique designed to examine changes in blood flow patterns in the brain, which are linked to neural activity in certain areas.

Rose's conception relates to my second point: empirical psychologists offer biological definitions as a way of ensuring 'legitimacy' for asexuals. This quest seems to refer back to psychology's history as a 'scientific' discipline, attempting to generalise results to whole populations and assert 'truths' by recourse to features inscribed within the body (see Davis 2010). Whilst accounts from empirical psychology stress that asexuality should not be pathologised (Bogaert 2006; Prause and Graham 2007; Brotto and Yule 2011), this is only so far as asexuality is viewed firmly within the heterosexual matrix, and the discipline can maintain the medicalisation of sexual 'dysfunction' within the terms of personal distress (Flore 2014). Thus, the figure of the 'asexual' emerges as a categorical other, a remainder of the deep structures of stereotypes that Gilman (1985) describes. Such stereotypes are shaped by the political, social and cultural context of our time. Psychologists in the twenty-first century work with a 'healthicization' model (see Conrad 1992), whereby sex is seen as an idiom for health. Asexuality thus emerges in relief to what *is* pathologised: Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD).³⁴

With particular reference to female sexuality, psychological research fails to note the lineage of frigidity, on which its views are based. This was only partially addressed in Brotto and Yule's (2011) study, which compared the psychophysiological sexual responses of asexual-identified and non asexual-identified women. It was found that there was no difference in physical arousal levels, but that asexual-identified women experienced less subjective sexual arousal. Whilst pitting the asexual against the sexual is in itself problematic, at least this study acknowledged that context and relational styles have a role to play in our (a)sexualities. Nevertheless, the assumption is that if a woman is not enjoying sex, she ought to seek help through psychological and medical avenues.

³⁴ Inhibited Sexual Desire Disorder (Lief 1977) and Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (Kaplan 1977) were conceptualised simultaneously. ISDD was adopted in DSM-III (APA 1980), which became HSDD in DSM-III-R (APA 1987). In DSM-IV (APA 1994: 117), HSDD was defined as: 'Persistently or recurrently deficient (or absent) sexual fantasies and desire for sexual activity that causes marked distress or interpersonal difficulty.' By DSM-IV-TR (APA 2000), HSDD was only viewed as pathological if a person experienced marked distress. In DSM-5 (APA 2013), male and female HSDD have been separated into Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder (*ibid*: 433-437) and male HSDD (*ibid*: 440-443), thus playing into the rhetoric that men experience stronger sexual desire than women. However, these are only diagnosed if personal distress is reported. Thus, asexuality has not been pathologised.

In recent times, pharmaceutical companies have begun to capitalise on this by offering a form of female Viagra: Flibanserin (see Cacchioni 2015). This speaks volumes of the health model that Tiefer (1995: 195-199) critiques in terms of its reliance on norms and deviance, universality, individualism and biological reductionism. Whilst empirical psychologists do not necessarily take the prescription of female Viagra as a goal, their theories lend valour to a neoliberal economy's potential exploitation of women's bodies, emotions and desires.³⁵

Thirdly, empirical psychologists refuse to acknowledge that science is a product of culture (Howes 2005: 5). Empirical psychologists work with 'perceptual paradigms' (*ibid*), yet rarely examine non-Western cultural representations of embodied consciousness (see Geurts 2005). Such representations would open up the possibility for viewing the body intersubjectively rather than as existing in isolation.³⁶ For instance, whilst Brotto et al. (2010) carried out the first mixed-methods psychological study of the subjective experience of asexual identity, they attempted to correlate asexuality with Schizoid Personality Disorder and avoidant attachment styles, characterised by a fear of intimate relationships, without fully exploring their participants' social and relational engagements.

Finally, empirical psychological analysis of asexuality assumes that men and women experience sexuality differently (Bogaert 2012). However, the explanation of this difference rests on stereotypes³⁷ of passive female and aggressive male sexuality. For example: Bogaert (2004: 285) draws on the discourse of proceptive (target-oriented) and receptive desire to distinguish between male and female sexuality. Such discursive strategies go unnoticed

³⁵ For an excellent feminist critique of Flibanserin, see Penny's (2015) article: <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/feminism/2015/09/we-don-t-need-female-viagra-we-need-feminism>.

³⁶ Geurts describes how the Anlo-Ewe people of Ghana have an intersubjective view of embodiment. A person's sense of movement is linked to his/ her general character, rather than anatomical features.

³⁷ Gilman (1985: 15-16) provides a concise genealogy of the term 'stereotype.' In the late eighteenth century, it referred to the casting of many copies of printing type from papier-mâche. It was only in the twentieth century that social psychologists adopted it, to categorise the world as an 'immutable structure' (*ibid*: 16).

when submerged within a 'scientific' discourse that asserts authoritative 'truths.' As noted by Fine and Merle Gordon (1992), empirical psychologists employ two main strategies to enable the elaboration of gender as a social role rather than as an issue of power. Either they stress the importance of retaining gender differences or else yoke these differences together in a language of neutrality. If empirical psychology were to engage with underlying power dynamics, context and meaning would come to play much more important roles in the research process. Having briefly examined the truth claims that empirical psychology makes, I will now explore how psychology as a discipline may work towards a more inclusive model for studying human subjectivities, drawing on recent research from cultural psychology.

Cultural Psychology: Challenges to the empirical paradigm

As described in the previous section, empirical psychology makes certain truth claims, assuming that sex and gender are natural categories and that all human beings are innately sexual. It fails to take into account cultural issues, personal or political motivations for identifying as asexual. This deficit is evident in Kantowitz, Roediger III and Elmes's (2008: 3) introduction to an empirical psychology textbook:

The goal of scientific psychology is to understand why people think and act as they do. In contrast to nonscientists, who rely on informal and secondary sources of knowledge, psychologists use a variety of well-developed techniques to gather information and develop theoretical explanations.

The tone of this address is patronising. It assumes a firm distinction between scientists and nonscientists, and implies that empirical psychologists hold the orb of truth. Observable realities are not the only way of understanding human beings. Whilst I see value in the evolutionary nature of science, where experiments build on and modify previous ones, and where a scientific community works together to meet a common set of disciplinary criteria, sometimes scientists fail to critique their own value systems (Kuhn 1962). The strongest critiques of empirical psychology arguably come from within the discipline of psychology itself, especially cultural psychology, as I will now describe.

In *Psychology Courting Culture: Future Directions and Their implications*, Valsiner (2012: 1092-1104) defines eleven future propositions for cultural psychology, which could be valuable for the psychological study of (a)sexualities. Valsiner firstly calls for an interrogation of the history of science, and secondly he asserts that there is no single cultural system. Significantly, Valsiner mentions the part empirical psychology has played in Western colonisation:

Both cultural anthropology and cultural perspectives in psychology were historically born in the European contexts, and could be seen as bearing the marks of sciences built on the needs of nineteenth-century expansion of colonial spheres of influence in the world' (*ibid*: 1094).

Colonial history and rapid globalisation have thus led to the rise of an 'indigenous psychologies' movement (*ibid*: 1095).³⁸ Valsiner (*ibid*: 8), refuses the indigenous cultures paradigm, where non-Western cultures are seen as wholly 'Other.' Rather, he highlights the uniqueness of each human being: 'We are all indigenous as unique human beings, social units, and societies' (*ibid*). The same thought could be applied to the figure of the 'asexual,' who could be seen as indigenous to Western capitalist culture, where sex sells.³⁹

Thirdly, Valsiner calls for the development of culturally sensitive research methodologies, and fourthly he encourages collaboration between cultural psychology and the biological sciences. Fifthly, he argues for closer links with other social science disciplines, and sixthly, encourages psychologists to look towards 'tension-filled oppositions' (*ibid*: 1097). This is a salient point for critiquing empirical psychology, which tends to assume 'an essence projected into the human psyche as if it were a course' (*ibid*). Rather, Valsiner encourages us to think of human subjectivity in terms of movement, where one can choose

³⁸ Rodríguez (2008: 276) defines globalisation as 'the name used to define the logic of high capitalism and the effect transnational corporations have in the governance of the world.' Yet, Brennan (2008: 39) highlights an ethical cohesiveness in this formation, since the world is 'being reconstituted as a single social space.' I am happiest with Krisynaswamy's (2008) definition, which highlights how 'postcolonialism' and 'globalization' are becoming closer in meaning. Consequently, the emerging global order offers 'a deeply disruptive yet ultimately enabling condition that unleashes subaltern resistance and enables creative adaptations in the margins' (*ibid*: 3).

³⁹ I will return to this in sections 6.1 (pp. 226-238) and 6.3 (pp. 246-254), where I will offer alternative histories for the Pre-Columbian indigenous subject and the (Post)colonial African subject, and relate these to the 'asexual' as indigenous subject of Western sexuality paradigms.

to be in tension with identity categories or to move beyond them. Valsiner (*ibid*: 1098) highlights the important role this shift would play: 'It would refocus the discipline from its current efforts to empirically prove that commonplace notions of the human psyche are true... and move toward the systemic and dynamic look at the actual flow of the psychological functions.' This view resonates with Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) work on flow, where happiness can be achieved through directing one's energy towards a goal that one does not expect to achieve, whilst learning to surpass it.⁴⁰

Valsiner's seventh point encourages us to study the interaction between the human psyche and material culture, and the eighth urges us to gain a deeper understanding of cultural processes and products. If these points were addressed, then a broader critique of capitalism and its role in constructing human sexualities could be engaged with. Valsiner's ninth point offers hope that cultural psychology will investigate 'regulatory processes of nonlinear kinds (in contrast with assuming models of linear causality)' (Valsiner 2012: 1092). This viewpoint sees the human being as an integrated system, comprised of different hierarchical layers. It is significant for Zorbitality as a concept, since it views the individual as multi-faceted and interacting with others and the world. Valsiner's tenth point urges us to reconsider the word 'participation' with relation to research, while his last point asserts that more self-reflexivity is needed amongst psychologists, so that personal value systems may be critiqued. This is humorously addressed in Heinrich, Heine and Norenzayan's (2010: 61) assertion that psychologists are actually the 'WEIRD' ones - Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic!

In summary, through its focus on sexual orientation as its primary analytic tool and the laboratory as a site of 'neutrality,' empirical psychology erodes the idiosyncrasies of its participants, a stance that is absorbed within popular culture. Sedgwick's (1990: 22-27) first axiom for reconfiguring sexuality - 'people are different from one another' - highlights a salient point of critique. Empirical psychology speaks of 'individual differences,' but only so long as these

⁴⁰ See section 3.4 (pp. 120-121) for how this relates to the collective Zumba experience.

correspond to rigidly defined categories. Sedgwick's work highlights the need to respect the embodied differences of each individual, and demonstrates that sexual desire is not necessarily innate.

Asexuality has gained visibility through psychology's claims to truth. Yet, through being viewed as a 'lack' (Bogaert 2004: 279), asexuality is doubly erased as a subject position (Flore 2014). However, social psychological research is beginning to address this point. MacNeela and Murphy (2015) drew on Identity Process Theory (Breakwell 1986), to highlight the cultural invisibility of asexuality and the importance of community in maintaining wellbeing. Using qualitative inductive analysis from open-ended survey responses, they showed how self-perception of asexuality as a source of personal meaning overturned the denial narratives surrounding asexuality within culture. Interestingly, they found that asexual-identified individuals' private acceptance of their orientation and public silence surrounding their identity was a key resilience strategy. The study showed how one may value one's identity positively on an interpersonal level but may experience a sense of discontinuity with regards to its social unacceptability. I hope that future psychological research on (a)sexualities acknowledges how societal structures inhibit ecstatic movement, thus working towards a more ethical society for all, as Zorbitality seeks to through its focus on a resistant imaginary. On this note of hope, I will now turn to sociological accounts.

Sociological accounts of asexuality

In contrast to psychological research, sociological accounts challenge the notion of asexuality as a biologically based sexual 'orientation' and bring it into the realm of a collective identity, which exposes the potentially alienating effects of a hypersexual culture (Przybylo 2011; Sundrud 2011), highlights the complex process involved in asexual identification (Scherrer 2008; Carrigan 2011; Pachon 2013) and challenges past assumptions about the medicalisation of sexual dysfunction (Przybylo 2013; Flore 2014; Kim 2014). Some research in this domain explores the intersection between asexuality and disability (Kim 2011; Lund and Johnson 2015; Cuthbert, in press).

Carrigan's (2011) work, which combined semi-structured interviews, online questionnaires and thematic analysis of online data, was significant, as it examined the lived experiences of asexual-identified individuals, and exposed the limitations of the expected life trajectory. Carrigan also examined how individuals come to an asexual identification, which generally involves a feeling of being different, a period of self-questioning and then finding community (*ibid*: 471). Carrigan's work also highlighted how AVEN as a locus for the asexual community draws on a 'lack' of sexual attraction discourse. Yet, this conceals a diverse array of relational and romantic styles. For example: some asexual-identified individuals may engage in sex with a partner, to establish a connection, without enjoying sex itself. Some may develop sexual relationships after a strong emotional is established, which is referred to as demisexuality. Some may have romantic relationships, without sex being involved (romantic asexuals). Some may not desire romantic relationships, but still desire close friendships (aromantic asexuals). Furthermore, some may move between feeling sexual and asexual (gray asexuals) [*ibid*: 468].

Carrigan's study built on Scherrer's (2008) work, which examined the meanings that asexual-identified individuals took from sexual/asexual behaviours, essentialist characteristics of asexuality, and romance as a distinct dimension of sexuality. Scherrer drew on answers to open-ended questions from 102 asexual-identified participants of an online survey. Scherrer's work was valuable, as it highlighted how asexual identity is both established through personal meaning *and* an intersubjective dialogue with others. Furthermore, many of the participants considered activities such as masturbation to be non-sexual. This disconnection is interesting in light of the history of sexuality, where masturbation has been viewed as sexual rather than bodily (Laqueur 2003). As Scherrer (2008) asserts, practices do not necessarily imply a relationship with anyone, and whether or not these can be interpreted as sexual is up to the individual.⁴¹ Indeed, sexual practices can be for oneself, while

⁴¹ For instance, Sloan (2015) unpicks the motivations for asexual individuals engaging in BDSM practices. BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Sado-masochism) refers to a sexual practice where one sexual partner takes on a submissive role and the other dominates. As Sloan asserts, BDSM allows us to reformulate 'dominant scripts about how sexual desire should manifest and be

relationships with others can be multiple, rather than dyadic.

Scherrer extended these ideas in her 2010 work, where she explored the relationship between asexuality and polyamory. Polyamory refers to ‘a form of relationship in which people openly court multiple romantic, sexual, and/or affective partners’ (Aguilar 2013: 106). In the cultural imaginary, as Scherrer argues, polyamory is often interpreted as engaging in multiple sexual relationships. Asexual polyamory challenges this narrow viewpoint, showing how polyamory can also be non-sexual. Indeed, if we look beyond the constraints of compulsory monogamy, interesting connections can be made between (a)sexualities and polyamorous friendship webs. This point was highlighted in Rothblum and Brehony’s (1993) radical lesbian text, *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships Among Contemporary Lesbians*, which examined the role of passionate female friendships in separatist communities. This work challenged the notion that genitality needs to be a central aspect of sexuality. Equally, it exposed the patriarchal structures that reduce women to their reproductive function and privilege dyadic heterosexual formations.⁴²

Recent research on non-monogamies, notably Barker and Langdridge’s (2010) edited volume, has further challenged the monogamous paradigm, arguing that it is based on an unequal exchange that privileges white heterosexual men. As Robinson (1997: 144) notes, monogamy ‘privileges the interests of both men and capitalism, operating as it does through the mechanisms of exclusivity, possessiveness and jealousy, all filtered through the rose-tinted lens of romance.’ Furthermore, Wilkinson (2010) proposes that compulsory monogamy disadvantages polyamorous individuals. Yet, she also highlights how polyamory narratives are too individual and that standing outside of a dyadic structure is also a political position. Indeed, polyamorous relationship rules are negotiated within the relationships themselves, as Anapol’s (2010)

valued, in effect creating spaces where they can express affections that do not implicate sexual attraction’ (*ibid*: 3). BDSM involves consent, a negotiated imbalance of power, and aftercare. It is not always genital, since bodies do not necessarily touch.

⁴² See chapter 2.3 (pp. 82-83) for more on separatist feminism.

work on relationship anarchy attests. Wilkinson (2010) asserts the need for queer politics to go beyond the pull of sex as transgressive. Indeed, we need to move *beyond* sexuality as a framework for evaluating people's lived experiences, rather drawing on our individual personal lives 'as sites of resistance from which we can challenge wider hierarchies of power' (*ibid*: 252).

We must remember that asexuality emerges as a 'lack' because it does not support the capitalist economy. The mantra of 'sex sells' is an unfortunate reality of the twenty-first century, as is the commercial concept of 'dating,' imported from American popular culture (Weigel 2016: 46).⁴³ As the queer Marxist theorist, Rosemary Hennessy (2000) highlights, late capitalism bolsters the dyad and this has real implications for how people may or may not *move* within the world. Writing as a lesbian who got married, she realised how she had: 'lived within the privileges of heterosexuality, how they [heteronormative structures] had bolstered not just my economic security but my shameless sense of entitlement and *ease of movement* through the world' (*ibid*: 2, emphasis added). The focus on movement here is central, since it serves to highlight how sexual identities play into the logic of capitalism. Whilst movement and fluidity are seen as liberatory forces within queer identities, Hennessy also makes us think about their limited political potential:

To the extent that they de-link sexuality from its historical connection to the human relationships of exploitation capitalism relies on, and to the extent that they reify desire, postmodern sexualities participate in the logic of the commodity and help support neoliberalism's mystifications (*ibid*: 109).

Furthermore, the lack of coordinated movement in queer approaches 'limits the development of collective agency' (*ibid*: 106). Zorbitality addresses this point through its focus on women's collective ecstatic movement, thus highlighting what queer sexualities arguably lack as a challenge to the capitalist mantra: a physically embodied collective politics of movement, which can be internalised as a resistant imaginary.

⁴³ To explore this in non-Western contexts, see Wong's (2015) paper on asexual marriage in China.

Recent sociological research has begun to move away from ‘asexuality’ as an individual subjectivity, and to see it as a relational process. This is demonstrated in Scott and Dawson’s (2015) work, which draws on a symbolic interactionist perspective. Scott and Dawson describe an asexual identity as: ‘a process of becoming within the context of negotiation with intimate others’ (*ibid*: 3). This approach eschews an essentialised view of ‘the asexual’ and instead looks to how (a)sexualities are ‘constantly unfolding and perpetually unfinished, subject to continuous reflection and revision’ (*ibid*: 10). They also highlight how the complex lived experiences of (a)sexualities are often elided, an issue that this thesis seeks to address by focusing on the visceral details of women’s memories. As Scott and Dawson highlight: ‘Each asexual story will be unique, not just because individuals have different constellations of experiences, relationships and interaction contexts to navigate their way through’ (*ibid*: 8-9). In this way, *moments* of intimacy within multiple relationships are key. It is through interactions *in context* that (a)sexualities transform.⁴⁴ Yet, I argue that the symbolic interactionist approach fails to acknowledge power structures that also have a bearing on one’s experience of the world. Charon (2004: 183) highlights this deficit: ‘When the focus is on interaction both personality dispositions and social structure fail to be examined in great depth.’ Furthermore, through its focus on behaviours, symbolic interactionism establishes itself within the positivist tradition of Darwin, while the body remains an abstract presence. Zorbitality seeks to address these deficits, by making ecstatic motion central to its conception.

Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives (Cerankowski and Milks 2014) is an important volume that addresses many of the shortcomings in the asexuality literature. This volume encourages us not to view ‘asexuality’ as a twenty-first century phenomenon. After all, not having sex is not really anything new. However, the formation of an asexual community (AVEN) is, although its politics are not monolithic. Cerankowski and Milks’s work challenges the univocal representation of asexuality as a sexual orientation, and rather seeks to

⁴⁴ This resonates with autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (pp. 154-162) and Ruth’s memory in section 5.4 (pp. 218-220).

deconstruct dominant representations of (a)sexualities, through interdisciplinary inquiry. The authors focus on the radical possibilities of asexuality as a queer identity and subject of feminist inquiry. Yet, as Milks (2014: 100-101) notes, both of these allied disciplines have been exclusionary towards the study of asexuality, largely because of an overtly sex-positive rhetoric, inherited from the years of the sexual revolution. Whilst the politics of that time enable a study of the asexual movement in the twenty-first century, as Cerankowski and Milks (2014: 2-3) argue, it is time that (a)sexualities are welcomed as viable queer and feminist identities. My thesis seeks to extend their work by developing Zorbitality as a radical framework that goes *beyond* sexuality and grounds itself in women's ecstatic movement, whilst looking to an ethical futurity that supports the wellbeing of *all* human beings.⁴⁵

Having described psychological and sociological accounts of (a)sexualities, I will now follow this genealogy back, by examining the roots of the ontological categories of sex, gender and sexuality. It must be noted that this section is taken from a largely Western and European vantage, since 'asexuality' has emerged within this cultural context. The genealogy of sex/ gender will emerge through the now mythological figure of the hermaphrodite, and the transsexual of Stoller's (1968) work, both of whom challenge the sex/gender division. Finally, I will work towards a Zorbital configuration of sexuality, drawing on Van Anders's (2015) Sexual Configurations Theory. A major strength of Van Anders's theory is the possibility of solitary sexual desire as a central sexual configuration. I will extend this analysis through a genealogy of female autoeroticism and an exploration of the vital role of 'ecstasy' in human (a)sexualities.

⁴⁵ Indeed, this is one of the main features of the Latin American model of collectivity. See my introduction to Part III (pp. 179-182).

2.2 - Sorting sex, gender and sexuality

The 'truth' of sex

It may surprise many people, but as Laqueur (1990: 8) describes, from ancient times to the eighteenth century, a 'one-sex model' existed. This was a continuum, where women were seen as lesser versions of men. Equally, women's genital organs were viewed as inversions of the male organs. Female sexual pleasure was widely discussed. In fact, in ancient times, female orgasm was seen as an essential component for conception to occur. Yet, near the end of the Enlightenment, scientists realised it was not required (*ibid*). As Laqueur notes, this had a negative impact on perceptions of female sexuality, as it aided in reinforcing the stereotype of women being passive. Indeed, this stereotype would shape the emergence of the 'frigid' woman in nineteenth-century psychoanalytic theory.⁴⁶

During the Renaissance, biological sex did not hold much weight within society. It was rather gender - albeit without the existence of the term 'gender' as an ontological category - that was considered of utmost importance. For example, same-sex relations in Renaissance times would have been seen as unnatural because of *what was being done to whom*, without having anything to do with the 'fact' that both partners were of the same biological sex (Karras 2005). Around the year 1800, this began to change, with biological 'fact' being seen to make a distinctive comment on the social order. Commenting on this shift, Laqueur conjures up the image of the line:

No longer would those who think about such matters regard woman as a lesser version of man along a vertical axis of infinite gradations, but rather as an altogether different creature along a horizontal axis whose middle ground was largely empty (Laqueur 1990: 148).

I do not wish to romanticise the one-sex model. However, it seemed to offer many more possibilities for human variability than the two-sex model. As Laqueur (*ibid*: 62) astutely observes, it could 'register and absorb any number of shifts in the axes and valuations of difference.'

⁴⁶ See section 2.3 (pp. 84-86) for this genealogy.

Whilst the one-sex model still held some sway in the nineteenth century, the two-sex one largely took hold. One may ask how this occurred. As Laqueur (*ibid*: 151) describes, there were a number of factors, both ‘epistemological’ and ‘political.’ In terms of epistemology, in the eighteenth century developments were occurring in the way that male and female bodies were being represented graphically. Whereas in previous centuries the female genitalia had been seen as inverted representations of the male genitalia, they were now seen as fundamentally different. This insight developed concurrently with growing knowledge of the separation of ovulation from sexual intercourse, through William Harvey’s (1628) work on blood circulation and his (1651) discovery that life originates from the egg. At this time, superstition played a major role in scientific understanding. Yet, in the nineteenth century, empirical science would develop, largely from Darwin’s (1872 [1859]) theory of evolution, which placed the biological body and its reproductive capacities at centre stage, and displayed sexist and racist undertones. In 1864, Spencer would coin the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ (Spencer 1864: 444), thus setting Social Darwinism in motion. Bagehot (1891) would draw on Darwin’s natural selection as a basis for denouncing the women’s movement, arguing that sex roles are defined by nature and are highly evolved. As Gould (1981) notes, Darwin’s work would also influence subsequent scientific disciplines such as eugenics (introduced by Francis Galton in 1883) and sociobiology (E.O. Wilson 1975). Eugenics would promote the selection of the best gene sets, asserting that the weaker elements of society should be eradicated. Darwin was sympathetic to this viewpoint, writing in the fifth edition of *The Descent of Man* (1871, volume 1: 168), that: ‘excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.’ Sociobiology, meanwhile, attempted to explain all social behaviour through evolutionary biology. This perspective took little account of individual subjectivities and was largely uncritical of its biases.

Darwin’s failure to analyse the biases of his theories resulted in their abuse. For instance, the Nazis utilised Darwin’s theories as a justification for the extermination of Jews, other ethnic minorities, and disabled people. In response, feminists such as Sayers (1982) have critiqued the misguided

application of Darwinian theory, by exploring the dynamics underpinning biological politics, while feminist biologists such as Kaplan and Rogers (1990) and Birke (1990), have advocated for the ethical use of science. Kaplan and Rogers (1990: 205) assert that scientific views are 'underscored by a host of assumptions, arguments, values (and prejudices) which are part of the biologist's social construction of reality.' Yet, undoubtedly, the theory of natural selection and the consequent development of Social Darwinism would have dramatic effects on how we view sex as an ontological category. Such a dynamic shift provided the rationale for sexual difference becoming a 'difference that required interpretation' (Laqueur 1990: 154).

In terms of political shifts, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw unprecedented displays of revolution - from the French and American Revolutions to the Latin American anti-colonial revolts - where the upheaval of social roles was commonplace. Prior to this, the codification of sex/gender was set in motion through Descartes's (1641) account of mind-body dualism, which asserted that the mind and body are separate. Descartes saw the mind as a thinking entity and the body as a non-thinking entity. At this stage, as Riley (1988) notes, women were not wholly identified with the body. Equally, the soul was untouched by the mind-body distinction and maintained a relatively autonomous position. As Riley (*ibid*: 18) highlights, in the Middle Ages, men and women possessed a 'democratic soul,' which would gradually be eroded in the following centuries. Speaking of female mystics of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, Riley remarks that: 'A continuity of sensual and spiritual ecstasy was at the least a possibility for both sexes, while struggles between flesh and spirit, where these were felt to be at war with each other, were not the prerogative of men alone' (*ibid*: 23). Riley's words demonstrate the flexibility of the one-sex model, where gender was not mapped onto sex, and where the soul as a vital life spirit guided human interactions.

The French Revolution (1789-1799), which involved individual struggles for class and sexual equality, coincided with the first rise of feminism in Europe and the US, with the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (de

Gouges 1791), as well as the Lockean marriage contract. Gradually, women became associated with nature and the body, while men became associated with the rational mind. The roots of sexual dimorphism took hold (Herdt 1996). The soul also had less relevance. With the rise of secular life and a free market economy, the capitalist system emerged, which was set in motion by fifteenth/sixteenth century European colonisers of the 'New' World. The concept of romantic love developed as a product of this, which can clearly be seen in Rousseau's novel, *Émile*, when Émile realises that 'a young man must either love or be debauched' (Rousseau 1979 [1763]: 470). Laqueur highlights how 'the remaking of the body is itself intrinsic to each of these developments' (1990: 11). Yet, none of these developments in themselves *caused* the two-sex system. As what I term 'Zorbitality' demonstrates, genealogies themselves are comprised of multiple influences, which emerge in different time periods and specific moments of transformation. Indeed, as the next section will show, shifting perspectives in dominant institutions, such as the Church and Medicine, would also play a role, together with the birth of the scientific study of sex, Sexology, in the late nineteenth century.

Having introduced the transition from a one to two sex system, I will now draw on the lineage of the hermaphrodite, a person who possesses ambiguous genitalia and/or variations in sex hormones, gonads or chromosomes (Fausto-Sterling 2000a), since s/he is useful for querying 'why biology supplies the unambiguous foundation for gender' (Harrison and Hood-Williams 2002: 50). Looking to a genealogy of hermaphroditism is important, since as Fausto-Sterling (2000b: 51) asserts, 1.7 percent of babies are born intersex. I will examine the case of the nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin (see Foucault 1980), who experienced the tragedy of the shift from one to two sexes. The hermaphrodite would gradually become a mythological creature, with the development of the concept of 'intersexuality' by Robert Goldschmidt in *Intersexuality and the endocrine aspect of sex* (1917). The UK researcher, Cawadias (1943,) would argue for the co-existence of the terms 'hermaphrodite' and 'intersex,' while Armstrong (1964) endorsed the word 'intersex,' thus marking a shift where hermaphroditism would come to be seen as a

stigmatising term (Germon 2009). By 2006, 'intersex' would become a negative diagnostic term for Disorders of Sexual Development (see Houk et al. 2006), which the intersex movement would vehemently reject. I will argue that there is a strong link between the twenty-first century 'intersex' individual and the twenty-first century 'asexual.' Both are connected via the rise of global communities, AVEN from 2001 and the 'intersex' movement (OII) from 2003, which turn the negativity of a diagnostic category into something positive. Significantly, both of their lineages built on the shift from one to two sexes and the growth of diagnostic sexual sciences.

The case of Herculine Barbin

In his introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, Michel Foucault (1980: vii) asks: 'Do we truly need a true sex?' This question echoes derisively, for it queries not only the primacy of sex in the modern world but also the relationship between sex and sexuality as a historical construct. The case of Herculine Barbin ('Alexina') [1838-1868] stands out in the annals of sexual discourse, since it exposes the fallacy of having a 'true' sex. Through reading her memoirs, one can see the sense of freedom yet shame Alexina felt as a hermaphrodite living in a closeted convent setting in the first half of the nineteenth century. Significantly, in centuries prior to the nineteenth hermaphrodites had enjoyed exemplary freedom. At the time, possessing features of both sexes was seen as implying a social reality, rather than a truth (Harrison and Hood-Williams 2002).

However, through the discourses of medicine and law, possessing ambiguous genitalia came to be viewed as perverse and subject to correction (Laqueur 1990). These forces denied the sense of playfulness Alexina exuded, as her physical appearance subtly androgenised what was considered 'feminine.' Equally, her intimate relationship with a woman, Sarah, was consummated without others realising the extent of its intimacy or indeed that Alexina possessed male genitalia. Ultimately, Alexina's ambiguous genitalia were her undoing within a society where the Church and medical profession were increasingly codifying sexual 'normality.' Thus, when Alexina's secret was uncovered, she saw her fate sealed by two looming figures: the priest and the doctor. Alexina was forced to confess herself and then was subject to a detailed

medical examination. Dr. Chesnet (1980 [1860: 128]) asserted that 'her tastes, her inclinations draw her towards women' and said of her genitals that 'these are the real proofs of sex.' Chesnet asserted that she needed to change sex in order to be true to the law. She was operated on and subsequently became a man: 'Abel.' Yet, Alexina had been forced to live within terms thoroughly inconsistent with her subjectivity. Subsequently, she committed suicide in February 1868.

As Butler (1990) notes, Foucault (1980) romanticises Herculine's account. He recalls a lost nineteenth-century world where bodily pleasures reigned supreme: 'a world in which grins hung about without the cat' (Foucault 1980: xiii). Furthermore, he seems to suggest that inhabiting a liminal identity is carefree, which is implied in his reference to 'the happy limbo of a non-identity' (*ibid*: xiii). Whilst Barbin (1980 [1868]: 99) speaks of 'the surges of pure ecstasy of my soul,' s/he is ultimately left with: 'Nothing. Cold solitude, dark isolation!' (*ibid*: 92). Furthermore, as Butler (1990) notes, Foucault's perspective denies the barred female homosexuality in Herculine's account. Indeed it displays a conflict between bodily pleasures outside of discourse and a 'true' sex produced by this discourse (*ibid*: 131). Butler skilfully highlights the queerness of Herculine's lifeline, since it did not go in a straight line. Rather, like most queer lives, it threatened to disappear. Her life and death thus reflected 'the ambivalent production of the law' (*ibid*: 143).

Alexina's story is just one exemplification of the ramifications of espousing sex as a concept of 'truth' and scientific inquiry. It allows us to question our two-sex model. In concluding this section, I look to Fausto-Sterling's (1993, 2000a, 2000b) dynamic systems model, where the developing body changes in the moment and over time, in interaction with others. This work stands up to the lack of engagement with biological discourses in poststructuralist theory. Fausto-Sterling (2000a: 22) advocates for a five-sex model,⁴⁷ 'where sex and

⁴⁷ Fausto-Sterling (2000a: 19) lists these as male, merm (an individual with female genitalia and male testes, but no ovaries), herm (an individual with both ovaries and testes), ferm (an individual who has ovaries and male genitalia, with no testes) and female.

gender are best conceptualized as points in a multidimensional space.’⁴⁸ This approach is significant for it refuses the sex/gender divide at the heart of much theorisation on gender and sexuality today. Sex is a continuum with many possible configurations. Indeed, the nature/nurture divide no longer exists, since organisms are ‘active processes, moving targets’ (Fausto-Sterling 2000b: 235). Fausto-Sterling uses the analogy of the neural networks of the brain, which are constantly firing in non-linear patterns to further define this. Furthermore, she acknowledges that no one academic discipline has all the answers to the question of sex/gender. Rather, an interdisciplinary dialogue is necessary, which takes into account all aspects of the person and their surroundings. I will now move this genealogy forward, by examining the splitting of the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ in recent decades.

The genealogy of gender

The purpose of this section is to extend Harrison and Hood-Williams (2002: 1) call to reconfigure sex and gender ‘without leaving the distinction in place,’ through an alternative theory of transformation and movement. As noted by Harrison and Hood-Williams (*ibid*), in Alexina’s time, the concept of gender did not exist. Yet, a conceptual space had been mapped out for it, through the codification of the ‘truth’ of sex. In this section I will firstly attempt to trace the genealogy of gender, by drawing on Germon’s (2009) *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea*. Germon describes how gender as an ontological category has only emerged in the last 60 years. Before then it existed solely as a source of linguistic distinction, emerging from the Latin word, *genus*, which refers to a category or class (Smith 2004: 4-5). Germon (2009) skilfully exposes how John Money (1952) initially employed the term as an ontological category in his doctoral research on hermaphroditism, which was then generalised to the wider population. Notably, Money did not separate the terms sex and gender. These only became firmly divided in Robert Stoller’s (1968) work on transsexuality, which served to both render intersex individuals abject and fuel the second wave feminist movement’s search for ‘liberation.’ Germon argues that Money’s theories are underestimated, as he suggested a complex

⁴⁸ Fausto-Sterling’s (2000a) paper revisited the five-sex model laid out in her 1993 work.

interaction between biology, environment and experience, and challenged the assumption that the term 'gender' has always existed. Yet, the forcefulness of his views had disastrous implications for many individual patients.⁴⁹

In spite of Money's suggestion that sex and gender cannot be fully separated, Stoller's (1968) work on transsexuality advocated for the sex/gender division, which has been widely adopted within mainstream discourse. Stoller strongly asserted that sex is biological and that gender is culturally determined.

Furthermore, he assumed that there are only two sexes and two genders. He went so far as to assert that 'abnormal cases' (*ibid*: 10) were those where gender, gender identity and gender role did not coincide. In the case of patients with ambiguous genitals, he stressed the need for the sex of the child to be decided based on their gender presentation. Indeed, this viewpoint has had major implications for those who wish to have sex change operations in the twenty-first century. In order to justify this procedure, individuals have to rely on gender essentialism in their narratives when discussing the issue with medical professionals (Butler 2004).

Stoller's research provoked many future theorists, notably feminists such as Oakley (1972), to consider the relationship between sex and gender. Oakley's work still relied on Stoller's belief that sex is wholly biological, gender its cultural referent, evidenced in her reference to 'the biologically abnormal' (*ibid*: 159). Oakley's work subsequently influenced other scholars, notably Butler (1990, 2004), who developed a performative concept of gender.⁵⁰ As Butler describes, gender as a discursive practice produces sex as apparently natural and prediscursive. She defines gender as 'the repeated stylization of the body, a

⁴⁹ The case of David Reimer, which Butler (2004: 57-74) describes, is a notable example. David was born a boy but through an accident during a minor operation, part of his penis was burnt off. David's parents consulted Money, who suggested that David should become a girl. David subsequently had a sex change operation, becoming 'Brenda,' but the doctors decided to wait until Brenda was slightly older to complete the surgery (*ibid*: 60). Years later, through advice from a competing physician, Milton Diamond, Brenda decided to become David again. In June 2004, as Butler's book was going to press, David committed suicide. Yet, through his death, he gave power to the intersex movement to campaign against medical surgical intervention, and encouraged the transsexual movement to critique 'idealized gender dimorphism' (*ibid*: 65).

⁵⁰ An interesting dialogue exists between Oakley's and Butler's theories. In a later work, Oakley (1997: 30) wrote that 'ultimately sex is no more natural than gender.'

set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler 1990: 45). Butler thus suggests that we repeatedly *do* our genders in a relational engagement with others, in a world that is governed by constraining norms. One limitation of Butler's (1990, 1993) work is that the body becomes a text, acted upon by discourse, whilst bodily agency and practices are elided (Stam 1998). Yet, Butler's theory is powerful, for she exposes the *real* effects of gender norms on people's lives and offers a model for ethical and sustainable relationships amongst all people, guided by the question of what 'maximizes the possibilities for a livable life, what minimizes the possibility of unbearable life or, indeed, social or literal death' (Butler 2004: 8). Reconfiguring gender norms is thus also a human rights issue.

In order to develop a more nuanced discussion of gender, it is important to examine accounts that highlight how biology can transform throughout one's lifetime, in a constant dialogue with environment and others. In the introduction to his extensive edited volume, *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, Herdt (1996) vehemently argues against the Western world's focus on sexual dimorphism: the assumption that there are only 'two types of human and sexual nature, male and female, present in all human groups' (Herdt 1996: 25). He highlights how the morphology of biological reproduction hangs over Western accounts, and that we need to engage more with non-reproductive sexualities. He asserts that the sex/gender distinction is not universal and rather depends on cultural classification systems, power structures and local meanings. Western sexologists want to 'create' (*ibid*: 22) a third sex or gender, as opposed to drawing on a model that values 'the adaptation of human cultures' (*ibid*). Western sexual dimorphism offers a 'quality of transformation' (*ibid*: 63), where sex, gender and sexual orientation are seen as fixed throughout the life.⁵¹ Herdt calls us to foreground the realms of human desires and pleasures - which may be directed towards other humans or non-human spirits - whilst acknowledging that categories are

⁵¹ However, this is not the case in all cultural contexts. See Nanda's (1996) chapter on the Indian *hijara*, which highlights how gender transformation is seen as an enriching force within Hindu culture.

only sustained if a community of interest and cultural rituals exist ‘across time’ (*ibid*: 60).

Yet, I argue that a more radical approach, which looks to the performances of the body, evolving within specific moments of collective movement is also central to this re-evaluation. This stance is reflected in Allegranti’s (2013) work on embodied performances of gender in dance/movement. She interrogates the relationship between sex and gender, by ‘probing an interdisciplinary dialogue between evolutionary biology and the politics of bodies in motion’ (*ibid*: 394). As Allegranti (*ibid*: 395) argues, sex and gender ‘are acquired and learned through socio-cultural regimes of discipline and intersubjective bodily practices.’ She highlights the embeddedness of the human being within the world and asserts that bodily routines are created through ‘the established ways of moving’ (*ibid*). Yet, she asserts that we can overcome this by developing alternative movement rites, through performative play. Thus, her work highlights the absence of the moving body in Butler’s oeuvre. The most significant part of Allegranti’s theory is her *developmental* model, which acknowledges that our bodies change throughout our life spans: ‘Our sexed and gendered experiences are adaptive and shape our flesh constructing our anatomy over time’ (*ibid*: 396).⁵² This resonates with Riley’s (1987) assertion that the meaning of the singular ‘woman’ has changed over time and across cultural context. Perhaps then, ‘woman,’ which conjures up both ontological sex and gender, is a moving configuration. Riley’s (*ibid*: 39) description captures this: ‘Nothing is assumed about an underlying continuity of real women above whose bodies changing aerial descriptions dance.’

As this section has highlighted, sex and gender are in constant moving dialogue. Indeed, through danced collective ecstasy, these terms are no longer relevant.⁵³ Having reconfigured the relationship between these terms, I will now turn to sexuality. I will draw on Van Anders’s (2015) Sexual Configurations Theory,⁵⁴ to lay some groundwork for Zorbitality. In the latter part of this section, I will

⁵² Virginia Woolf’s (1993 [1928]) novel, *Orlando*, reflects this theme.

⁵³ This point will also be highlighted in autobiographical passage 8 (pp. 170-171).

provide a genealogy of autoeroticism, which I will offer as an alternative centralising force for female sexuality.

Situating and reconfiguring sexuality

As Johnson (2015: 2) describes in her psychosocial manifesto, sexuality 'can refer to a set of practices or behaviours, a range of feelings or affects, or as a way of categorizing people on the basis of their sexual orientation, sexual identity or political allegiances.' It is also worth noting that sexuality is a historical construct (see Foucault 1978 [1976]). As Kim (2014) notes, the term was first used in the eighteenth century to describe plants' sexual organs, subsequently being applied to humans in 1833 (Picken 1833: 251).

Furthermore, as Oosterhuis (2000) highlights, the term was initially associated with the biology of human sexual difference but gradually became connected with individual psychologies.

Foucault's (1978 [1976]) conception of disciplinary power, which encroached on bodies and their pleasures in such a way that sexuality became a way of conveying the truth of one's being, is essential to understanding this shift. Disciplinary power was closely interlinked with Foucault's (1977) [1975]) conception of biopower, which focused on the welfare of populations rather than individuals. Throughout the nineteenth century, dominant institutions sought to control the sexualities of four different populaces: women, children, married people, and the sexually perverse (Foucault 1978 [1976]). Through the working of disciplinary power and biopower, the stock characters of the hysteric woman, the masturbating child and the pervert were created (*ibid*: 36-49). The homosexual emerged as a pathological figure in 1868, when Karl Maria Kertbeny first coined the terms homosexuality and heterosexuality.⁵⁴

Homosexuality came to be seen as 'a hermaphroditism of the soul' (Foucault 1978 [1976]: 43), thus referencing the hermaphrodite as a monstrous Other in

⁵⁴ These terms were written in German as 'Homosexualität' and 'Heterosexualität,' and were mentioned in the contents of a private letter. However, Kertbeny did not openly mention 'Homosexualität' until 1869, when he wrote an anonymous pamphlet calling for the legal emancipation of homosexuals. Homosexuality and heterosexuality were first coined in English in C.G. Chaddock's (1892) English translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

the nineteenth-century cultural imaginary. Yet, the equally constructed nature of heterosexuality was never questioned (Karras 2005).

In the nineteenth century, the scientific study of sexual orientation, behaviours and desires was also emerging, notably through Krafft-Ebing's (1922 [1886]) study of sexual psychopathology. In England, Havelock Ellis (1913 [1887]) engaged in the first major study of homosexuality. Around the same time, the 'confession' of sexual perversions became an enterprise, with Sigmund Freud's development of psychoanalysis around 1890. From this, the hysterical woman emerged, through the 'hysterization of women's bodies' (Foucault 1978 [1976]: 104). The scientific study of sexuality developed and officially became known as Sexology in 1908, with the publication of Magnus Hirschfeld's *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft*. Sexologists' views were based on sexual dimorphism and the assumed naturalness of heterosexuality, with Weeks (2010: 6) highlighting their 'obsessive categorization of sexual perversities.' Yet, their work offered some potential. For instance, Hirschfeld (1910) identified several sexual intermediaries, which enabled a more nuanced exploration of sexual diversity. Yet, when the Nazis came to power in the 1930s, they destroyed his library. Nevertheless, researchers such as Alfred Kinsey (1948, 1953) continued this legacy, by further exploring the sexual behaviours of men and women.

In the 1960s and 70s, second wave feminism and the gay rights movement gained momentum, with some strands endorsing a sexual libertarian perspective.⁵⁵ Yet, as Jeffreys (1985) succinctly argues, this perspective, endorsed by lesbian/gay scholars such as Rubin (1984) and Weeks (2010), tends to assume that having sex is liberatory for all people, whilst failing to critique patriarchy. For instance, Weeks (2010: 2) distinguishes between 'the high priests of sexual restraint and the advocates of sexual liberation.' This is a problematic distinction, and it is without surprise that he fails to mention asexuality at any stage throughout his book. Nevertheless, I admire the way that Weeks relates sexuality to movement, by highlighting its 'chameleon-like ability to take many guises and forms' (*ibid*: 1).

⁵⁵ See section 2.3 (pp. 80-84) for an analysis of the different strands of second wave feminism.

In *Sexuality and Its Discontents* (1985), Weeks creates a tangible link between capitalism and sexuality, which provides some groundwork for Zorbitality as a conceptual framework. As Weeks highlights, capitalism is not linear, since it 'has no controlling will' (*ibid*: 21). Yet, paradoxically, the intimate ties it proposes are rigid. It colonises our intimate lives, so to speak. As Weeks notes, capitalism has a 'tendency to penetrate and colonise ever-increasing areas through its commoditisation and commercialisation of social life' (*ibid*: 22). This goes hand in hand with the 'commercialisation of courtship' (*ibid*: 24), which proposes that the monogamous couple is the ideal. With these points in mind - a critique of dogged sex-positivism, an endorsement of sexuality's fluid characteristics and an awareness of how capitalism manipulates human desires - I will begin to examine how sexualities may be reconfigured, drawing on Van Anders's (2015) Sexual Configurations Theory.

In the twenty-first century, researchers in the social sciences are beginning to look beyond linear paradigms of sexuality to more multifaceted visions. Hammack and Cohler (2009) used a narrative and life-course perspective to focus on the situational qualities of sexuality. This was a significant development from previous theories, which had asserted that certain sexual development pathways were expected for normal development. Dillon, Worthington and Moradi (2011) developed a unifying model, which can be applied to any sexuality, thus asserting that we all have sexual identity processes. Meanwhile, Morgan (2012) put forward a multidimensional model of sexuality. Morgan highlighted the difference between the terms 'sexual orientation' and 'sexuality,' orientation being attached to a label and sexuality to our specific experiences. She argued that sexual categories create 'essentialist models that are overly fixated on sexual orientation and underemphasize other facets of sexuality' (*ibid*: 55). In other words, sexuality is about more than attraction to another person. Indeed, as Clark (2008: 3) astutely observes: 'Desire can even be conceived of as a form of emotional energy that is not necessarily focused on an object.' This is significant for Zorbitality as an emergent concept, which acknowledges that people channel their energies in

different ways and may actually find the flow of their (a)sexualities in activities, which are not necessarily 'sexual' in a traditional sense.

Van Anders's (2015) Sexual Configurations Theory (SCT) provides some conceptual tools for the concept of Zorbitality. SCT proposes a fluid model, where sexuality is not only about what sex/gender you are attracted to but also other factors such as 'age, partner number, type of sexual activity, consent, solitary sexuality, and intensity among others' (*ibid*: 1178). It is a truly interdisciplinary theory, 'rooted in literatures on polyamory, asexuality, intimacies, and social neuroendocrinology' (*ibid*: 1179), each of which is interdisciplinary in its own right. It is also rooted in lived experience. SCT emanates from an ever-moving centre, where autoeroticism and polyamory are possible, thus referencing the realigned erotic poles of Zorbitality.⁵⁶ One of the most significant aspects is allowing solitary sexual desire as a central aspect of one's sexuality. Indeed, Van Anders acknowledges that partnered and solitary sexual desire are related yet different.⁵⁷ Furthermore, she proposes a dynamic approach to sexual orientation, where she favours the terms 'eroticism' and 'nurturance' rather than 'lust' and 'love.' As a term, eroticism is inclusive of various (a)sexualities, since it does not imply that one's desire needs to be partnered: 'Eroticism refers to aspects of sexuality tied to bodily pleasure, orgasm, arousal, tantalization, and related concepts' (*ibid*: 1183). Nurturance refers to feelings of warmth and commitment towards others, whilst not assuming the sense of infatuation tied up with romantic 'love' (*ibid*).

Van Anders's (2015) SCT extends Braidotti's (2006) nomadic subjectivity, which views sexuality as a collectively structured subjectivity, 'flowing and nomadic, not stable and rooted' (Braidotti 2006: 245). Van Anders stages

⁵⁶ This conception reminds me of the work of the twentieth-century choreographer, Merce Cunningham, which drew attention to the accidental moment, through the use of chance procedures. Furthermore, he broke down the uniformity of the *corps de ballet*. Whilst all the dancers in Cunningham's pieces entered in unison, they then broke up to dance different phrases and rhythms at the same time. This immediately moved the focus away from one individual dancer at centre-stage and allowed for transformations within groups. As Cunningham (1998 [1985]: 30) wrote: 'The space could be constantly fluid, instead of being a fixed space in which movements relate.'

⁵⁷ See pp. 75-80 of this thesis for a more detailed account of autoeroticism as a forgotten genealogy in the lineage of female (a)sexualities.

Braidotti's theory, for it offers a clear articulation of the various possibilities of sexual fluidity, as well as a practical model for exploring this.⁵⁸ Van Anders's assertion that we all have a unique sexual configuration is particularly important. It offers political potential for a more ethical approach to otherness, as it does not assume that any sexuality is more liberatory than the other. Finally, it is a theory that looks beyond the Western paradigm of genital sexuality, and acknowledges that other aspects play important roles in people's (a)sexualities. As a theory, it can be used across cultures, without reducing any sexuality to a categorical orientation. In this way, it offers a conceptual groundwork, which Zorbitality seeks to extend, through a focus on collective ecstatic movement. In order to further build the concept of Zorbitality, I will now provide a genealogy of autoeroticism as a possible *centralising* force.

Female (a)sexualities: The forgotten strand of autoeroticism

In his insightful work on the cultural history of solitary sex, Laqueur (2003: 18) astutely observes that masturbation - the process of achieving sexual gratification from one's own body - can be seen as 'the first truly democratic sexuality.' Masturbation only became a moral issue in 1712, with the emergence of the term '*Onanism*' in a work that Laqueur attributes to the early pornographer, John Marten.⁵⁹ As I will describe, psychoanalysis would partially liberate masturbation, under the term 'autoeroticism,'⁶⁰ introduced by Havelock Ellis in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1913 [1897]), and described as 'sexual emotion generated in the absence of an external stimulus proceeding directly or indirectly, from another person' (*ibid*: 161). Ellis saw autoeroticism as the transformation of 'repressed' sexual energy, but also as a manifestation of art and poetry (*ibid*). In other words, sexual pleasure came from within rather than

⁵⁸ Van Anders (2015: 1191-1198) includes circular diagrams of possible configurations.

⁵⁹ The identity of the author is contested. The term '*Onanism*' referred back to the Book of Genesis (38: 7-10), where Onan attempted to have sex with the goddess, Athena. Rather than impregnating her, he accidentally spilt his seed. Many have attempted to interpret this as an act of *coitus interruptus*, but Marten decided to cash in on it. As Laqueur (2003: 16) mentions, Marten's text originally appeared as an advertisement for 'strengthening tincture' and 'prolific powder,' with the suggestion of either sexual abstinence or taking one of these 'medicines.' By 1750, as noted by Bennett and Rosario (1995: 6), there were 19 editions of the book, which had sold 38,000 copies.

⁶⁰ I prefer the term 'autoeroticism' to 'masturbation,' as it implies the ownership of a distinctive libidinal economy, and defies the stigmatising discourses surrounding masturbation.

through another person. I argue here that Ellis's conviction concerning 'repressed' energy takes little account of individual erotic preferences. Yet, there is a Dionysian possibility in Ellis's formulation. Gore Vidal (1973 [1966]: 219-220), for instance, comments on the role of inner ecstasy in the autoerotic process: '... the theater of his mind early becomes a Dionysian festival.'

Unfortunately, because of the dominance of patriarchy worldwide, female autoeroticism, as a peripheral or central sexual identity, is seen as either taboo or else as a preparation for sexual relationships with men (Frith 2015). Many of the prohibitions surrounding female autoeroticism result from an internalisation of psychoanalytic discourse, as articulated by Freud in his early twentieth-century writings on female sexuality. Freud advanced a number of problematic claims: (a) that 'mature' female sexuality came with the transition from clitoral to vaginal sexuality (*Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality* 2001 [1905] and *On The Sexual Theories of Children* 1991 [1908]) and (b) that libido was predominantly masculine (*New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1949[1933])).

Freud's contention was that when a woman remained at the clitoral stage, this resulted in neurosis:

Since the sexual function of many women is crippled, whether by their obstinate clinging on to this excitability of the clitoris so that they remain anaesthetic in intercourse, or by such excessive repression occurring that its operation is partly replaced by hysterical compensatory formations – all this seems to show that there is some truth in the infantile sexual theory that women, like men, possess a penis (Freud 1991 [1908]: 195).

It is questionable how Freud comes to the conclusion that women desire a penis, and furthermore why he views clitoral masturbation as a masculine activity. However, it is worth noting that in his later writings (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1949 [1922] and *New Introductory Lectures*, 1949 [1933]), Freud began to offer a more liberating view of sexuality. In lecture 20 of the *New Introductory Lectures*, Freud began to look beyond partnered sexual intercourse as the centralising force of sexual life, since otherwise 'you run the risk of excluding from it a whole host of things like masturbation, or even

kissing, which are not directed towards reproduction, but which are nevertheless undoubtedly sexual' (Freud 1949 [1922]: 255). Yet, within the same article (*ibid*: 262), asexuality is referred to as a derogatory assumption surrounding childhood sexuality.⁶¹

In lecture 33 of his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1949 [1933]), Freud began to develop a more nuanced vision of female sexuality, as he acknowledged that cultural and social conventions constrain women: '... we must take care not to underestimate the influence of social conventions, which also force women into passive situations' (*ibid*: 148). Yet, whilst this offered potential, Freud associated the repression of female aggressiveness with 'strong masochistic impulses' (*ibid*). As he asserted:

... the phrase 'feminine libido' cannot possibly be justified. It is our impression that more violence is done to the libido when it is forced into the service of the female function... the achievement of the biological aim is entrusted to the aggressiveness of the male... (*ibid*: 169).

Freud's vision is highly problematic as he implies that the libido is masculine and that female sexuality is naturally passive. Furthermore, he suggests that infantile sexuality is autoerotic but that in order for a woman's sexuality to become mature, she must pass from the clitoral to the vaginal stage (Freud 2001 [1905]: 220-221). Autoeroticism in Freud's vision is thus only seen as an intermediary stage. This thesis seeks to subvert Freud's rhetoric by reclaiming autoeroticism as an important element of a democratic feminine libidinal economy, grounded in movement.

In *Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl*, which explores the relationship between autoeroticism and literary pleasure,⁶² Sedgwick (1995: 150) asserts that sexual orientation categories *obscure* autoeroticism as a 'self-contained'

⁶¹ The relationship between childhood sexuality and masturbation is controversial. As Bennett and Rosario (1995: 2) note, in December 1994, Doctor Jocelyn Elders, the US surgeon general was dismissed following comments at an AIDS conference, where she said that children should be taught that masturbation is a normative activity.

⁶² For more on visual representations of socially deviant masturbating women (witches and prostitutes) in the fifteenth century, see Weigert's (1995) chapter. For more on Klimt's nineteenth-century images of female autoeroticism, see Weidinger 2015). For more on literary representations, see Coffey's (2012 [1973]) novel, *Marcella*.

central sexual identity. Yet, there is power in autoeroticism's 'traceless' nature, since it acts as 'a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that may owe relatively little to political or interpersonal abjection' (*ibid*: 135). Here I will examine how female autoeroticism was liberated as a unique feminine libidinal economy by researchers and feminists in the post Second World War Western world.

During the 1940s and 50s, Kinsey's research on human sexuality found that many women masturbated. Furthermore, in the 1960s and 1970s, researchers (Masters and Johnson 1966) and feminists (Koedt 1970; Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1978 [1971]; Dodson 1974) would reclaim the clitoris as the main source of female sexual pleasure. Masters and Johnson's (1966) work was valuable, for it based its findings on interviews with women and observations of women reaching orgasm, and asserted that the clitoris needed to be stimulated in order for sexual climax to be reached. Meanwhile, the Boston Women's Health Collective (1971) developed an educational book, which saw masturbation as an act of bodily exploration. Yet, whilst recognising that autoeroticism was in no way inferior to partnered sex, it did not consider autoeroticism as a libidinal economy *in its own right*. This deficit was addressed by Koedt in *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* (1970) and even further by Dodson in *Liberating masturbation: A Meditation on Self Love* (1972), where she discussed female masturbation as a politically and personally liberating act.

As Dodson (*ibid*: 18) wrote: 'Masturbation is our primary sexual life. It is the sexual base. Everything we do beyond that is simply how we choose to socialize our sexual life.' This quote is significant for it posits autoeroticism as a centralising force, without a need for intervention.⁶³ From my experience, autoeroticism is a process that enables an autonomous female desire to flow, through collective joy and rhythm, as part of a broader openness to the world. It resists the commercialisation of female eroticism and instead reasserts Dodson's vision: autoeroticism can be liberating for women *themselves*. Indeed, as Laqueur (2003) attests, female autoeroticism can be seen as 'the real truth of

⁶³ See also Katherine's memory, section 5.3 (pp. 201-204).

a woman's sexuality,' as well as 'the affirmation of something positive and different' (Laqueur 2003: 75). This resonates with what I term Zorbitality.

Addressing the positivity of difference also means reunifying the female autoerotic body. For example, the vagina and clitoris are still subject to a problematic distinction, even though research has shown that they are not separate parts of the female anatomy but rather work together in creating female sexual pleasure (O'Connell et al. 1998).⁶⁴ Irigaray's (1985 [1977]: 23-33) work challenges the fragmentation of the female autoerotic body. She notes that touch is an important aspect of female sexuality, articulated through the constantly touching lips of the labia, which enclose the clitoris. Irigaray reclaims female autoeroticism as a source of women's bodily autonomy, by acknowledging a genealogical link to other women across time and space. Autoeroticism thus challenges 'the disappearance of her own sexual pleasure in sexual relations' (*ibid*: 24). It is an ecstatic way of experiencing our own bodies, whilst creating a genealogical connection with other women.

To conclude, I wish to highlight the importance of collective ecstasy for a Zorbital account of female (a)sexualities. Butler (2004: 19) describes gender and sexuality as '*modes of being dispossessed*.' She highlights the relational and collective nature of this dispossession,⁶⁵ which involves:

Being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others, finding oneself in a trajectory of desire in which one is taken out of oneself, and resituated irreversibly in a field of others in which one is not the presumptive centre (*ibid*: 25)

A Zorbital configuration of sexuality is thus an ethical one. Yet, it opens one up to vulnerability, reflected in Butler's (*ibid*: 26) question of 'where one finds enduring ties,' in a world underpinned by sexual norms; where one's relational losses may continuously be considered less than those of monogamous couples,

⁶⁴ Fillod's (2016) 3D model of the clitoris offers revolutionary potential for debunking century-old myths that have repressed female sexuality. The model shows that the clitoris is much larger than previously thought, and has a somewhat similar structure to the penis, as it is comprised of legs, foreskin and a central bulb. Its structure also suggests why some women may not find penetrative penile-vaginal sex pleasurable (see Theobald 2016).

⁶⁵ I will explore the relationship between collective ecstasy and sexuality via danced rites in sections 3.3 (pp. 117-119) and 6.2 (pp. 238-246).

and where passionate friendships are devalued. As my account suggests, whilst these ties may not be found in genital sexual relationships, they can be found in collective danced rites, of which Zumba is one example. I will return to this in chapter 3, but for now I will provide a genealogy of female (a)sexualities.

2.3 - A genealogy of female (a)sexualities

This section will draw on the frigid woman of nineteenth-century psychoanalysis and the single woman of twentieth/twenty-first century postfeminist culture, as cultural referents of the female 'asexual.' I seek to highlight the discourses that constituted them and to demonstrate how stock characters essentialise individual experiences of (a)sexualities. There are a number of reasons for my choice of these characters. Firstly, they allow us to reflect on the stereotypes surrounding female asexuality, notably coldness (as associated with frigidity) and loneliness (as associated with singledom), in the period spanning the birth of feminism and its aftermath in the Western world. Secondly, these figures share a micro-genealogy with other cultural referents, notably the medieval witch. Thus, a sense of historical transformation is enabled. Thirdly, both are seen as conveying unconventional and dangerous movement. Thus, I will seek to reconfigure their movement through a dance of agency. Before I engage with this however, it is necessary to contextualise their trajectories, by navigating the shifting tides of feminism in Europe between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is from these shifts that the female 'asexual' has emerged as a subject of Western discourse.

Navigating feminisms past and present

In the twenty-first century, we often refer to a feminist 'movement.' Meanwhile, the various stages of feminism are conceptualised as 'waves.' Yet, as I will argue, the history of feminism is not grounded in the ecstatic movement these images imply, but rather in a static return to the same liberation/repression debate. The overlapping waves of feminism have not enabled women to ecstatically dance around the patriarchal structures that have constrained them. Indeed, as I will show, the frigid woman and the single woman emerged both from men's

fear of women's ecstatic movement *and* women's failure to unite in a collective dance, which would hold common rhythms, whilst celebrating difference. Thus, Western feminism requires the sense of transformation embodied in Caribbean rhythmic life, characterised by a repeating rhythm that cyclically returns, but always to something new (see Benítez-Rojo 1996: 3).

First wave feminism of the nineteenth/ early twentieth centuries is often associated with a drive for women to achieve equal rights with men, primarily in the areas of education, work and voting.⁶⁶ Yet, an interesting tension can be observed within factions of feminism at the time, notably Kathryn Oliver of the Sex Reform Movement, who stated that sexual intercourse seldom entered her mind and Stella Browne who advocated sexual 'freedom' (see Jeffreys 1985). This division would reverberate during the first sexual revolution of the 1920s, when spinster teachers demanded equal pay with men and decided to live a separatist life. Yet, many men and women saw the spinsters' sexual inactivity as fundamentally negative, rather than as a dance of agency.

The second wave is often associated with the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and 70s,⁶⁷ influenced by legislative reforms of the Labour government, changes in laws on abortion and homosexuality, and the legalisation of the contraceptive pill. During this time, feminist critiques of pornography and discussions surrounding rape also emerged (see Brownmiller 1975; MacKinnon 1979). However, as Milks (2014) notes, the liberal feminist movement was overtly sex-positive and largely exclusionary of asexual-identified women. The representation of 'asexual' women as subjects of stasis continued.

Often forgotten in the history of the second wave is the radical feminist movement, as articulated in early manifestos such as the *Redstockings Manifesto* (Redstockings 1968) and *Sisterhood is Powerful* (Morgan 1970). Radical feminists asserted that it was not just legislative reforms that men and women

⁶⁶ 'Feminism,' as a word for the organisation of the women's movement only emerged in 1895 (Sanders 2001: 235).

⁶⁷ Indeed, the first sexual revolution of the 1920s is often forgotten, hence showing how Western culture sees sexual behaviour as fundamentally liberating.

needed, but rather that the very structures of society, which institutionalised patriarchy, needed to be radically altered (Douglas 1990). This vision offered the possibility of ecstatic motion for all women. Yet, as I will now describe, divisions between women again acted as a deterrent.

As Douglas notes, there were two broad branches of radical feminism. The first asserted that men's and women's biological differences should not be socially significant, and that reproduction was a method through which men oppressed women (Millett 1970; Firestone 1970; Wittig 1981). This branch called for separatism, which started as heterosexual. Subsequently, it developed into lesbian separatism, which challenged the separation between female friendship and erotic love (see Frye 1978; Hoagland 1988). The second branch highlighted the importance of a shared culture among women and consciousness raising (Redstockings 1968), thus exploring the power dynamics underlying women's oppression. Yet, this group had a white middle-class heterosexual bias and was unsympathetic towards lesbian separatism (Douglas 1990). Some advocated motherhood as a method of reclaiming power (Daly 1978) and developed an alternative feminine libidinal economy through poetic writing (Cixous 1976 [1975]; Irigaray 1985 [1977]). Yet, since the two branches of radical feminism held dichotomous assumptions about a feminist futurity, the possibility of uniting women in collective movement across time and space was limited.

As Douglas (1990) asserts, the differences in lesbian/heterosexual viewpoints created a shift to a repression/expression debate in the 1980s. Sexual liberationists, such as Hollibaugh and Moraga (1981) argued that lesbian sex had desexualised women's sexual relations. This viewpoint continued into the 1990s, when a feminist backlash reduced radical feminism to a narrative of 'repression' (Assiter and Carol 1993: 2). Yet, I agree with Cerankowski and Milks (2010), who assert that both pro-sex and radical feminists use sexuality in equally problematic ways, as they are both too concerned with sexuality as a form of liberation. Asexuality as a critical lens⁶⁸ has the potential to both

⁶⁸ Przybylo (2014: 121-122) aptly refers to asexuality as 'an interdisciplinary method.'

critique the liberatory rhetoric within twenty-first century feminism⁶⁹ and reorient the work of radical feminists, so it is more inclusive of all women, including transgender individuals.⁷⁰ Indeed, female (a)sexualities via Zorbitality expose the tiresome rhythms of feminisms past and present, and potentially offer a new rhythmic life, which can support women's collective movement, whilst viewing the term 'woman' itself as a dancing process (see Riley 1987).

This reconfiguration is also relevant for recent research on female (a)sexualities (see Fahs 2010; Przybylo 2011). Although this research views asexuality in terms of positive political resistance, it is stuck in feminist narratives of the past. Drawing on the example of the heterosexual separatist group from the 1960s, Cell 16, Fahs (2010) argues that women actively chose asexuality, as an act of political resistance. Thus, she assumes that there is a necessary link between radical feminism and asexuality where there may be none. Meanwhile, drawing on Butler's (1990) work, Przybylo (2011: 455) defines volitional female asexual identity as an act of 'resistance' within 'an unsafe, disorienting sexusociety.' She argues that female (a)sexualities have the potential to expose 'natural' sexuality as an imitation, formulated through repeated sexual language and desires. Whilst this vision seems to reflect Benítez-Rojo's (1996: 3) characterisation of Caribbean rhythmic ingenuity, as cyclically repeating to something new, Przybylo does not reach this vision. She fails to mention collective resistant choreographies that would challenge genital models of sexuality, and does not examine how postfeminist culture constrains women's ecstatic movement.

Postfeminism emerged in 1980s media culture. It simultaneously incorporated and repudiated feminism, promoting a sexualised image of women as an ironic 'critique' of feminism past (McRobbie 2009, Lazar 2011; Budgeon 2011). As Gill (2007) highlights, postfeminism should not be seen as a backlash against feminism but rather as a more insidious postfeminist 'sensibility.' This sensibility focuses on self-determination and seeming independence, sexual

⁶⁹ A striking example of this was when a woman at a 'feminist' conference (Talking Bodies, Chester, March 2015) asked me: 'how can you be asexual?'

⁷⁰ I reference here Greer's (2015) exclusionary remarks concerning male to female transgender individuals, which stated that they were 'not women.'

visibility and the apparent enjoyment of this, without acknowledging that self-surveillance and consumer culture collude to make women see themselves as autonomously sexualised rather than playing into a misogynist gaze. I agree with Braidotti (2006: 46) when she asserts that a rhetoric of sameness pervades postfeminism, and indeed a sense of white supremacy, where 'diversity' is only superficially endorsed: 'Post-feminist liberal individualism is simultaneously multicultural and profoundly ethnocentric. It celebrates differences, even in the racialized sense of the term, so long as they conform to and uphold the logic of Sameness.' Zorbitality challenges the postfeminist rhetoric by imagining collective ecstatic motion as the centralising feature of a reinvigorated feminist movement, based around a celebration of personal movement styles within a shared rhythmic culture. With this in mind, I will now turn to the two central figures of this genealogy: the frigid woman of nineteenth-century psychoanalysis and the single woman of postfeminist culture, whose genealogies I seek to reconfigure through movement.

The frigid woman: The subject of psychoanalysis

As Cryle and Moore (2011: 37) narrate, frigidity (the state of being averse to sexual intercourse) was initially associated with both sexes and only in the twentieth century became exclusively associated with women. The period from 1880 to 1930 was particularly troubling, as a myth was propounded that a woman could be sexually awakened by intercourse with a virile male. Equally, the correlation between female frigidity and the denial of dependency on men was endorsed (*ibid*: 130). Guided by the birth of psychoanalysis, this transition saw all sexual orientations that were not directed towards sexual intercourse as forms of frigidity. Here, the concept of female 'sexual anaesthesia' emerged. It was first mentioned by the sexologist, Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1922 [1886]), where he connected it to theories of biological and cultural degeneracy and mentioned asexuality as the extreme of stunted sexual growth. Otto Adler (1904) further defined it as a form of deficient sensitivity and sensation. Later still, in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1913 [1897]), Ellis would attempt to resolve the dichotomy between the diabolic and angelic aspects of women, asserting that men and women had equal sexual impulses.

Yet, he concluded by stating that libido was present in women but latent, again defining female sexual experience within male parameters. The image evoked in these theories is that of the woman as a ventriloquist's dummy, the male 'expert' pulling her strings. Therefore, I want to reconfigure the frigid woman through a dance of agency.

A genealogical link exists between the nineteenth-century frigid woman and the diabolic witch, who was hunted during the medieval period, both of whom can be seen as cultural referents of the female 'asexual.' The fact that these women could manifest a sense of festival within their own bodies was seen as a threat, connected with the image of the abject mother (de Oliveira and Still 1999: 103). More specifically, each of these figures was punished, due to men's fears of their eternal movement and transformation. This perspective can clearly be seen in Kramer and Sprenger's (1968 [1487]: 63) *Malleus Maleficarum*, a fifteenth-century handbook for witchcraft, which viewed the witch's transvection as threatening: 'And among their chief operations are being bodily transported from place to place, and to practise carnal connexion with Incubus devils...' The same fears would later be restaged in Freud's (1897) theory of female hysteria, which was influenced by the image of the woman's wandering womb, put forward by Galen in the second century. According to Galen, the womb was 'altogether erratic... like an animal within an animal' (in Lefkowitz and Fant 2005: 248). Freud demonstrated his fears of this erratic movement in a letter to Fliess from 24 January 1897 (in Freud 1954: 188), in which he also stated that he had ordered a copy of the *Malleus*:

The parallel with witchcraft is taking shape, and I believe it is conclusive. Details have started crowding in, I have found the explanation why witches "fly"; their broomstick is apparently the great Lord Penis. Their secret gatherings, with dances and other entertainment, can be seen any day in the streets where children play.

Freud problematically chooses to associate the broom with a desire for the penis. He also sees the witch's dance as threatening the innocence of children, rather than as a dance of autonomy. In the same letter, Freud links the witch's unconventional movements to the emergence of hysteria as a 'negative' female perversion (*ibid*: 189), which he associates with frigidity. He notes that the

witch's movements, now channelled through the hysterical woman, possess young boys. Furthermore, he postulates that these movements preserve 'the remnants of a primitive sexual cult, which in the Semitic east may once have been a religion' (*ibid*), and asserts that he understands 'the stern therapy of the witches' judges' (*ibid*).

As well as being profoundly ethnocentric, Freud's statements deny women's rights for their desires to be understood on their own terms. As de Beauvoir (1953 [1949]: 178) astutely observes, psychoanalysts have suggested that:

... all the pleasure woman gets from intercourse might come from the fact that she symbolically castrates him and takes possession of his penis. But it would seem that these theories should themselves be submitted to psychoanalysis, and it is likely that the physicians who invent them are engaged in projecting their own ancestral terrors.

As de Beauvoir highlights, the source of psychoanalysts' terror is fear of the Other, which Zorbitality as a conceptual framework addresses by endorsing an ethical openness to otherness. Zorbitality thwarts the constraints put on the witch and hysteric by focusing on the lived experiences of the dancing female body. After all, when we dance around the positioning of the frigid women, we collectively embody Ensler's (2013: 39) assessment: '*Hysteria* – a word to make women feel insane for knowing what they know.' I will now continue the genealogy of the frigid woman, by turning to the single woman of postfeminist culture, and the intermediary figure of the spinster.

The single woman: The subject of postfeminism

In *Sex and Sanctity* (1912), Lucy Re-Bartlett speaks of a type of celibate woman who does not go beyond friendship with men, but who puzzles people because she is not 'the least cold' (in Jeffreys 1987: 308).⁷¹ As Re-Bartlett asserts, although there is possible loneliness in this position, it is also a 'force' that offers 'the wings of liberty' (*ibid*). Yet, unfortunately, in postfeminist culture, the transformative possibilities of this position are not acknowledged. Instead, the looming figure of the spinster from the first sexual revolution of the 1920s is

⁷¹ Whilst the asexual community largely seek to distinguish between asexuality and celibacy to gain legitimacy, the distinction is less than clear, especially when we begin deconstructing heteronormative structures. See Abbott's (2001) history of celibacy.

evoked. Spinsters decided to live separatist lives amongst women and refused sexual relations with men, as a means of working towards gaining equal pay (see Jeffreys 1985). Yet, men and women alike described them as embittered and lonely.⁷² An anonymous female author wrote on 23 November 1911 in *The Freewoman*:

of the High Priestess of Society. Not of the mother of sons, but of her barren sister, the withered tree, the acidulous vestal under whose pale shadow we chill and whiten, of the Spinster I write. Because of her power and dominion. She, unobtrusive, meek, soft-footed, silent, shamefaced, bloodless and boneless, thinned to spirit, enters the secret recesses of the mind, sits at the secret springs of action, and moulds and fashions our emasculate Society. She is our social Nemesis... She haunts every library (quoted in Jeffreys 1987: 602).

The connection the author makes to images of old age and infertility is striking. The words 'barren' and 'withered' demonstrate how women choosing not to have sex violate the codes of youthful femininity. The spinster can 'chill' others, thus evoking the coldness of the frigid woman. She is represented as possessing non-human traits, being described as 'bloodless and boneless.' As in the case of the frigid woman, it is her unconventional movement that is the main source of fear: she can enter 'the secret recesses of the mind.' The spinster, a sorceress of sorts, can apparently 'mould' women as she wished. Finally, her ecstatic motion is thwarted, as she is placed firmly back in the static cell of the library.

Perceptions of the single woman as a subject of stasis would continue into the sexual revolution of the 1960s. As noted by Marks (2001), from the 1960s, the single woman was central to the marketing of the contraceptive pill. ENOVID's Andromeda advertisement (1964) featured a woman being released from the chains of her body's cyclic nature. However, the contraceptive pill has a dark history, rooted in eugenics and Western domination of other cultures. Primarily white male doctors conducted medical trials on poor and illiterate Haitian and Puerto Rican women, to 'control' sprawling populations (Marks 2001). Many of the women were sterilised and were not told of possible side effects. Yet, the pill has been marketed as a symbol of white women's 'independence.' This

⁷² This perspective was also evoked in the account of my respondent, Scarlett, when discussing her father's view of her sexuality (see p. 206).

angers me, since the pill inhibits what women's bodies naturally do, and women are forced to bear the burden of birth control.⁷³ Thus, the Andromeda advertisement spoke much more about the normalization of female sexuality and Western domination than the ecstatic movement of an autonomous feminine libidinal economy.

Unfortunately, the colonisation of women's thought and movement has had implications for twenty-first century media culture. As Blackman (2004) highlights, men's magazines highlight mastery of women, while women's put forward romanticised notions of femininity, whilst encouraging women to be self-determining. As Blackman notes, this plays into a capitalist logic, where women are encouraged to disavow warmth whilst remaining open to romantic relationships. Furthermore, media culture acts on 'already-constituted' (*ibid*: 230) worries that women may have, which may have negative effects for female mental health.

As Negra (2009: 85) notes, postfeminist culture treats women with a 'diagnostic gaze.' In the process, the emergence of new feminine subjectivities is limited because of the myth of 'the presumed universality of this feminine desire to be coupled' (Taylor 2011: 14). As McRobbie (2009) succinctly argues, there is a sense of melancholia in the postfeminist representational strategy, where choice is problematised. Pro-choice discourses exist alongside images of the 'empowered' hypersexual woman. Women's desires are perpetually directed to sustaining the needs of a male gaze, which excludes the possibility of same-sex love and the importance of friendships (Trimberger 2006). This in turn creates a sense of 'illegible rage' (McRobbie 2009: 94), through which women replay myths of femininity, whilst realising that other subjectivities are possible. Yet, female (a)sexualities via Zorbitality have the potential to subvert the postfeminist rhetoric. Indeed, what I seek is a reconfiguration of singledom through the ecstatic movement of self-desiring female bodies.

⁷³ In October 2016, attempts began to develop a male contraceptive injection, which is a welcome step to acknowledging this history (see Devlin 2016).

2.4 - Concluding remarks

To conclude, I wish to make a brief comment on how we may reconfigure feminism, so it may be more inclusive for *all* people. I value Daly's (1978) concept of 'Sparkling,' which highlights the sense of movement evident in female collectivity: 'Light and warmth, which are necessary for creating and moving, are results of Sparking. Sparking is creating a room of one's own, a moving time/spaceship of one's own, in which the Self can expand, in which the Self can join with other Self-centering Selves...' (*ibid*: 319). In rethinking feminisms, it is valuable to couple Daly's Sparking with Rich's idea of the lesbian continuum, which encompasses 'a range - through each woman's life and throughout history - of woman-identified experience' (Rich 1980: 648). Rich's work does not reduce this continuum to the experiences of lesbian-identified women but rather highlights reciprocal exchange amongst women. Indeed, when the erotic is not pitted against friendship any longer, what emerges is joy and the realisation that we are women in flux: we can move in and out of this continuum, 'whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not' (*ibid*: 651). Writing in the twenty-first century, I am addressing Rich's call by asserting that we can look to an asexual continuum without reducing this to the experiences of asexual-identified women. Indeed, we must move *beyond* sexuality, to an emergent concept of collective ecstatic motion.

In this chapter, I critiqued psychological and sociological approaches to (a)sexualities, deconstructed the concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, and explored cultural referents of the female 'asexual.' The purpose of this was to highlight the need for a new term that holds a broader array of female subjectivities, and focuses on transformative movement, rather than stasis. In the next chapter I will turn to alternative genealogies that focus on the power of ecstatic female movement, thus demonstrating the Zorbital analysis of this thesis. I will engage with the Zorbital literary imaginary, women in dance, Dionysian collective danced rites and finally Zumba as a twenty-first century manifestation of Dionysus.

Chapter 3: Zorbital framework: Towards a theory of Zorbitality

Introduction

The Caribbean rhythm is in fact a metarhythm which can be arrived at through any system of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, or body language (Benítez-Rojo 1996: 18).

This chapter puts forward a new framework for viewing female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. It offers various alternative genealogies to those described in chapter 2. The purpose is to foreground Zorbital analysis, which I will draw on in the remainder of the thesis, both in my me-search and collective biography. As described in the introduction to this thesis (see pp. 19-26), Zorbital analysis is a method of reconfiguring female (a)sexualities, through transformation, movement and dance. It situates itself in the Caribbean and Latin America as sites of historical transformation and rhythmic vitality. The sources I draw on here highlight a threefold process, which is integral to what I suggest is the Zorbital. This process is characterised by: (i) vulnerability, which transforms into (ii) inner ecstasy and finally (iii) collective ecstatic motion. Furthermore, the internalisation of a collective spirit acts as a resistant imaginary, which can sustain one in moments of vulnerability.

Each section of this chapter internally embodies the threefold Zorbital process. I firstly examine the Zorbital literary imaginary, exploring how collective movement rites enable shifts in women's subjectivities. Secondly, I turn to dance, exploring the narrative of Stravinsky's twentieth-century ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, where a young 'virgin' dances herself to death for the god of spring. Yet, I counter its narrative by focusing on Katherine Dunham's reconfiguration of Stravinsky's work through West African collective rites. Thirdly, I chart the history of Western colonisation and its suppression of collective ecstasy, by invoking the collective rites of Dionysus. This section will stage a primary vulnerability, wrought by colonial encounters in the 'New' World, which will transform to collective ecstatic motion in the final section. Here, I will conceptualise Zumba as a twenty-first century Dionysian rite, which deconstructs the assumed naturalness of the dyad in Latin social dance, thus working towards a clear conceptualisation of Zorbitality.

3.1 - The Zorbital Literary Imaginary

In this section, I draw on two texts, Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (2009 [1915]) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1979 [1976]), to demonstrate Zorbital analysis, a process that seeks to reframe female (a)sexualities through movement and transformation. The following criteria influenced my choice of texts. Both feature (i) women who could be perceived as asexual; (ii) women undertaking voyages, either past of present, to or from Latin America; and (iii) dance-based transformative moments that cause shifts in the protagonists' subjectivities. In Woolf's novel, the central character, Rachel, who could be described as tentatively asexual-identified, experiences transformation on an imaginary South American island called Santa Marina. In Piercy's novel, Connie Ramos, the Chicana central character, challenges the dominant regimes that enchain her by escaping to a futuristic society, which offers an ethical collective vision. Both novels evoke a lived subjectivity that can be described as Zorbitality, whilst also demonstrating a Zorbital structure. Thus, as well as examining important danced scenes, I will also make a comment on the way Woolf's and Piercy's writing process enables a Zorbital framework to emerge. Finally, I will examine how these works encourage us to see that: (i) time is not linear, through the process of travel; (ii) our relationship to space is central to subjective transformation; and (iii) memory is a process of endless becoming, where possible sustainable futures can be enacted.

Before I examine the texts, it is important to stage why this section on the literary imaginary is a necessary step in rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. As Wright Mills's (1959) work on the sociological imagination asserts, in academic work, the connection between biography and history is often devalued. This is further highlighted in Levitas's (2013) work on utopia as method, where she argues that the imagination is a vital resource for enacting alternative futures: 'The imagination and critique of utopian alternatives as speculative sociologies of the future generates forms of knowledge, of social systems that are at least theoretically possible and of tendencies in the real that might make them potentially really possible' (*ibid*: 125). To be succinct, we do not live in a sustainable world. Therefore, it is

important that we look to imaginary possibilities, and harness them as narratives of resistance.

Since Zorbitality situates itself in the Caribbean and Latin America as sites of historical transformation, it is also important to mention the connection between this analysis and magical realism as a Latin American fictional genre that 'facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction' (Parkinson Zamora and Faris 1995: 5-6). Thus, I also wish to highlight that whilst this method of analysis is relatively new within the Western tradition, its lineage reaches back into the history of Latin America, where myths and legends were central to a collective consciousness amongst Pre-Columbian populations, and the West African slaves. With these thoughts in mind, I will now turn to Woolf's (2009 [1915]) novel *The Voyage Out*.

Woolf's *The Voyage Out*

Woolf's novel traverses two separate voyages in Latin America on a ship called *The Euphrosyne*: the first to an imaginary island called Santa Marina and the second deep into the jungle. Indeed, this setting is significant, for travel disrupts our perception of space and time (Rojek 1993). In Woolf's novel, the voyage offers the central character, Rachel Vinrace, a (post)colonial encounter, where she reflects on various colonisations: British colonial rule, Latin America as a site of colonisation and men's colonisations of women's bodies. Rachel thus starts from a position of vulnerability, which has a connection with the first Zorbital process. Yet, simultaneously Rachel realises her freedom, thus enacting the second process of inner ecstasy:

... Europe shrank, Asia shrank, Africa and America shrank... But, on the other hand, an immense dignity had descended upon her; she was an inhabitant of the great world... She was more lonely than the caravan crossing the desert; she was infinitely more mysterious, moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources... for as a ship she had a life of her own (Woolf 2009 [1915]: 29-30).

Being contained within the moving space of the ship is the first step in Rachel's transformative process. As Gilroy (1995: 4) highlights, the ship is 'a living,

micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion' which focuses 'attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland...' In this way, Rachel, who could be described as tentatively asexual, configures herself as an agentic vessel, whilst also challenging the assumption that colonised countries are 'child-like, patiently waiting for illumination and purification from elsewhere' (Guardiola-Rivera 2010: 7). Rather, Rachel highlights Glissant's (1997: 14) assertion that there is power in 'errantry,' reflected in her comment that: 'Thinking was no escape. Physical movement was the only refuge...' (Woolf 2009 [1915]: 301).⁷⁴ Thus, Rachel acknowledges the transformative power of movement, which is key to her inner ecstasy.

Rachel embodies a sense of radical freedom. She has never been in love before. She questions the relations between men and women and wonders why a person is expected to venture outside of one's solitude. A particular scene, in which a married man, Richard Dalloway, kisses Rachel without her consent, has particular relevance for this analysis. At first, Rachel feels a sense of becoming - that something is transforming within her: 'Life seemed to hold infinite possibilities she had never guessed at' (*ibid*: 80). Yet, afterwards the scene haunts her, as it causes her to reflect on male entitlement.⁷⁵ Rachel ultimately decides that she enjoyed the sensations of being kissed, but *not* the principle behind it. Yet, simultaneously a sense of inner ecstasy emerges from an original vulnerability. 'The vision of her own personality, of herself as a real and everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or the wind, flashed into Rachel's mind, and she became profoundly excited at the thought of living' (*ibid*: 90). Rachel subsequently learns of the British and Spanish conquest of Santa Marina and the colonisers' obliteration of Native American peoples, thus evoking Latin America as Zorbitality's locus.

Significantly, the most marked shifts in Rachel's subjectivity occur in a danced scene in chapter 12, which ends in collective ecstatic emotion, thus reaching the

⁷⁴ Woolf carried this idea into her political work, *Three Guineas* (1938), asserting that '... as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world' (*ibid*: 197).

⁷⁵ This resonates strongly with my autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (see pp. 154-162).

third Zorbital process. Couple after couple take to the dance floor: '... the eddies whirled, the couples circled round in them, until there was a crash, and the circles were broken up into separate pieces' (*ibid*: 169). Rachel firstly dances with Hirst, a Cambridge misogynist, who is working to settle a future colonial state in India. Rachel dances well because she has an innate sense of rhythm. Yet, Hirst, an inexperienced dancer, has a rigid way of thinking and moving, which renders their styles incompatible:

A single turn proved to them that their methods were incompatible; instead of fitting into each other their bones seemed to jut out in angles making smooth turning an impossibility, and cutting, moreover, into the circular progress of the other dancers (*ibid*: 170).

Instead of trying to find a way of moving with Rachel, Hirst *chooses* to stop the dance and to subsequently chide her for not having read Gibbon's book on the history of the Roman Empire. This shows that restrictive views of women create restrictive configurations of movement. Yet, the scene changes dramatically when Terence Hewet asks Rachel to dance. When Rachel remarks that 'we [men and women] should live separate; we cannot understand each other; we only bring out what's worst' (*ibid*: 174), Terence's response shows that not all men are brutes. It is with little surprise that, having developed a relationship of mutual trust, 'when they joined hands in the dance they felt more at their ease than is usual' (*ibid*: 175-176).

Later in the evening, spontaneous dancing ensues, which points to a positive way of viewing women's sexuality through movement. In order to prolong the dance, Rachel plays unspecified dance tunes on the piano, to which people improvise. When someone remarks, '... that's not a dance,' Rachel replies: 'It is... Invent the steps' (*ibid*: 185). The characters are filled with arguably more ecstasy than when they were engaged in conventional couple dancing, as each person does their individual dance within a collective. The third Zorbital process of collective ecstatic motion is naturally reached through the spontaneity of the movement. For instance, Hewet swims 'down the room in imitation of the voluptuous dreamy dance of an Indian maiden dancing before her Rajah' (*ibid*). This scene reflects the sense of collective ecstasy that Zumba embodies, through its combination of various rhythmic components, which

make people move without thinking, radiating a sense of joy: 'Once their feet fell in with the rhythm they showed a complete lack of self-consciousness' (*ibid*: 186). Furthermore, some of the ball goers move alone and others in pairs. There is no set way of moving. Finally, the ball goers engage in a round dance, forming a big circle, swinging around 'faster and faster and faster, until the strain was too great, and one link of the chain - Mrs. Thornbury - gave way, and the rest went flying across the room in all directions...' (*ibid*). It is fitting for this thesis that Woolf's dancing scene ends in a mesh of rhythms and collective joy.

In a series of transformative moments following the ball (chapters 13 and 14), Rachel falls in love with Terence. Firstly, having got hold of Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), she realises the inner ecstasy that reading opens up for her. Her thoughts are set in motion as she thinks beyond what she had previously known. Stopping for a moment amongst nature, she asks herself aloud: 'What is it to be in love?' (Woolf 2009 [1915]: 197). In the aftermath of this questioning, she still does not fully understand the nature of her relationship with Terence. She looks at the sea, 'dancing away as far as the eye could reach' (*ibid*: 248) and subsequently realises that she wants the Universe: the sea and the sky. She cannot understand love of just *one* person, which Terence initially cannot comprehend:

... She wanted many more things than the love of one human being – the sea, the sky. She turned again and looked at the distant blue, which was so smooth and serene where the sky met the sea; she could not possibly want only one human being' (*ibid*: 352).

Rachel's statements are a metaphor for the expansive nature of female desire, a discourse that has historically been silenced within the cultural imaginary. I am reminded of Clément's (1986: 4) words: 'She has a woman's *craving*. Craving for what? For Everything of course, for the Great Universal Everything To this immense, deep desire, vast as a sea, she succumbs, she sleeps She slept, she dreamed The beautiful dream!'⁷⁶ Indeed, the internalisation of the

⁷⁶ The sea and sky are also important images in my account (see pp. 155-157) and in Anna's memory in section 5.4 (see pp. 212-217).

collective motion of the waves is a major step in Rachel's transformation,⁷⁷ which resonates with the collective ecstatic motion she experienced at the dance.

Rachel and Terence get engaged, with an acceptance of Rachel's desire for something beyond traditional romantic love. Rachel realises the queer nature of her disorientation. This resonates with Ahmed's (2006) work on queer phenomenology, which highlights how subjective transformation is enabled by our shifting relationship with space. Rachel's reflections on the ecstatic movements of the dance serve to highlight a salient feature of Zorbitality: the *internalisation* of a collective spirit, which transforms one each time it is remembered. Whilst one may feel in disarray during the process of transformation, one reaches a sense of clarity in the aftermath:

She felt herself amazingly secure as she sat in her armchair, and able to review not only the night of the dance, but the entire past, tenderly and humorously, as if she had been turning in a fog for a long time, and could now see exactly where she had turned. For the methods by which she had reached her present position seemed to her very strange, and the strangest thing about them was that she had not known where they were leading her (Woolf 2009 [1915]: 366).

The danced scene enables Rachel to live more ecstatically in the present whilst being able to reflect on the past with more compassion. Furthermore, she transcends rigid ways of thinking. Even if Rachel ends up in a position that is expected of a young woman (i.e. – engaged), she and Terence have devised their own rules, where Rachel's libidinal economy can be held in its expansive joy. This could be read as a sense of Zorbital becoming. At the end of the novel, Rachel catches a fever, and dies. Yet, she has realised her love for the sea and sky, and has held this within a moment of ecstatic union with Terence. One can imagine her dancing ecstatically at the edge of sea and sky.

To complete this analysis of Woolf's novel, it is necessary to make a comment on what may be seen as evidence of its Zorbital writing. Sage (2009 [1992])

⁷⁷ Woolf would further explore this theme in her later novel, *The Waves* (1931), which charts the interconnecting trajectories of six friends over a life course. Each chapter is prefaced by a changing sea and sky scene, which reflects a journey from youth to maturity.

asserts that Rachel has an autobiographical link with Woolf. Woolf's lack of desire for physical intimacy could also be read in Rachel's narrative as a woman, not strictly asexual-identified, but on the margins of this identity. It is not surprising, as Sage suggests, that Woolf chooses death rather than consummation for Rachel. Yet, Woolf also decides to focus on what is 'formless' (*ibid*: xx) in Rachel, as a plane of possibility. This connects with the colonial narrative of the novel, which 'explores what beginnings involve' (*ibid*: xxi). In particular, the second voyage into the jungle bends time and, as Sage argues, connects us to Darwin's voyages, which also altered what time and space meant in human history: "In supplying humans with a pre-human prehistory, he had opened out time and shrunk its recorded portion' (*ibid*: xxii). Yet, referencing my critique of Darwin's work in section 2.2 (see pp. 62-63), I would argue that Woolf develops a lineage that goes beyond the racism and sexism of Darwin's vision. Rather, I agree with Guardiola-Rivera (2010: 339), who asserts that writing itself is a form of 'seafaring,' which connects both Western and Latin American traditions. Equally, the nautical metaphor was central to the emergence of capitalism under the conquistadores (*ibid*). Yet, remembering Rachel's comment that 'as a ship she had a life of her own' (Woolf 2009 [1915]: 30), this logic is reversed and transformed into an assertion of female agency. Perhaps most significant is Bayley's (1984: 73) assertion that Rachel dies, so as not to become a 'character' on whom the patriarchal codes of culture are pressed. Indeed, in the process of dying, she avoids 'having to take part in an art form shaped and dominated by the masculine principle' (*ibid*). By reconceptualising the novel as a genre, Rachel's death starts 'to look like a sign of life' (Sage 1992: xxviii).

As this Zorbital analysis attests, Rachel started from a position of vulnerability. Yet, inner ecstasy was transformed into collective ecstatic motion through both danced scenes and scenes where she felt in communion with the sea as a symbol of eternal motion. These points are significant for reconfiguring female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, as they show how collective ecstatic motion allows us to envision more ethical worlds, both for women and for all human beings. I will now examine this in relation to Piercy's work.

Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*

Marge Piercy is a politically engaged writer. She has been involved in the anti-war and women's movements, as well as ecological and mental health projects. These themes also emerge in her utopian novel, *Woman on the edge of time* (1979 [1976]), where she envisions a future world where gender roles and racism do not exist, biological reproduction does not occur, the dyad is not the norm and female (a)sexualities may exist on their own terms. In this section, I endorse McBean's (2014: 37) reading of Piercy's work, which asserts that it represents:

a form of feminist futurity that engages with progress in time as necessarily uneven, discontinuous and fractured, speaking to contemporary demands for a feminist futurity that might require more nuanced accounts of the past.

As this Zorbital analysis highlights, it is through time travel to a future utopia, Mattapoissett, in the year 2137, and especially through collective danced scenes that the central character, a poor Chicana woman called Connie Ramos, finds a way of overcoming the patriarchal and capitalist institutions that enchain her. She moves from a position of vulnerability, through to inner ecstasy and collective ecstasy in a particular danced scene in Mattapoissett. This encourages her to take action through the internalisation of a collective spirit.

As an unemployed Chicana single parent with a history of mental illness, living in New York, Connie lives on the 'borderlands' of existence, to draw on Anzaldúa's (1999) phrase. At the start of the novel, Connie attempts to save her niece, Dolly, from her violent pimp, Geraldo. Yet, due to racist motivations, Connie is interned. We learn of her past history: her daughter, Angelina, who was taken from Connie following a fit of violence; and her two previous internments in mental institutions, Bellevue and Rockover. Connie finds herself interned at Rockover again, which Moylan (1986: 123-124) describes as: 'a microcosm of the bureaucratic capitalist system, with its attendant racism, sexism, and violence.' Wealthy white medics run the hospital, while many of those interned are Latino or black. Connie's situation is embodied by stasis: 'She was caught in a moment that had fallen out of time and would never be over, never be done...' (Piercy 1979 [1976]: 20). This places her in an

immediate situation of vulnerability. Yet, simultaneously she imagines her future freedom, embodied in 'the spring rhythm of conga drums through the streets' (*ibid*: 29).⁷⁸ This shows how the *imagining* of collective ecstasy can act as a tool of resistance. More significant for this thesis, Connie sees freedom as located within the complex rhythmic formations of Afro-diasporic dance. Furthermore, we learn of Connie's ability to contact spirits from outside, a skill that she utilises to connect with the utopian future, whilst interned.

Often unmentioned in the analysis of the novel is Piercy's subtle advocacy of asexuality, which manifests itself in the characters of Sybil (from present time) and Magdalena (from the futuristic utopia). The nurses see Sybil as a 'lesbian,' as she does not have sexual relations, whereas Sybil merely remarks to Connie that she does not want to be 'a dumb hole people push things in...' (*ibid*: 85). Whilst Connie sees more power in sex, she recognises that Sybil was 'thoughtful about the way things were and the way they might be' (*ibid*: 86). Meanwhile, Connie (*ibid*: 137) asserts that Magdalena 'can't get a man.' Yet, as Luciente, the central character of the futurist utopia explains: 'Connie, we don't get each other. And we respect people who don't want to couple' (*ibid*). Luciente thus highlights Magdalena's relational style as an innate personal preference, completely outside of heteronormative structures and capitalist discourses of ownership. Luciente advocates a form of non-sexual polyamory, where there is power in the collective, which also resonates with Rachel's desire for something beyond the love of one human in Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (2009 [1915]). Luciente also highlights the instability of the dyad and the power of the triad, since each child in Mattapoisett has three mothers.

Mattapoisett has a strong link with the colonisation of Latin America. Luciente is of Indian origin, thus pointing to the indigenous Pre-Columbian populations who were wiped out by diseases brought from Europe. Furthermore, in chapter 6, Bee says that he previously travelled in Latin America, which made him 'brood about those centuries of the rape of the earth, the riches stolen, the

⁷⁸ This could be described as a partial Zorbital process, which I highlight in my reimagining of Katherine's memory in section 5.2 (see pp. 196-199). See also Zorbital Flow 2 (pp. 268-269).

brutalizing and starving of generations... toward that day when all trace of that pillaging will be healed' (Piercy 1979 [1976: 115]). Thus, the novel engages with the history of Western domination of the 'New' World.⁷⁹

Collective danced rites are central to the ethical future of Mattapoisett. Connie realises after only a few visits to Mattapoisett that it has the spirit of Latin American collective movement: 'Yes, they were not like Anglos; they were more like Chicanos or Puerto Ricans in the touching, the children in the middle of things, the feeling of community and fiesta' (*ibid*: 119-120). This contrasts significantly with the image of being 'in line,' (*ibid*: 163) at the hospital, which features prominently throughout the present life scenes. In chapter nine, a community festival is held in Mattapoisett, to celebrate the sanctioning of a community decision. The party resembles a Dionysian rite. It features drumming and lavish food. Everybody wears disposable flimsies, party outfits made of algae. A sense of Dionysian ecstasy is evoked, especially through an image of weaving:

About ten people were playing with long luminous cords, which they fixed somehow at intervals and wove in and out so that a great dully glowing web was created in which people got caught... Jackrabbit was hopping among the strands, leaving a nimble zigzag wake (*ibid*: 175).

Following these scenes, everybody goes to the meetinghouse, where images of four different coloured moons appear on the rounded ceiling. The images shift shapes, starting as 'whooping cranes' (*ibid*: 180), before transforming into a myriad of other creatures. All of the images reflect the history of Western colonisation. Yet, the image sequence ends in 'water flowing, which becomes a crane flying' (*ibid*: 181), thus offering an alternative theory of evolution, perhaps inspired by Amerindian concepts of space and time.⁸⁰ Through its focus on historical transformation and an acknowledgement of the history of Western colonisation, this scene holds a Zorbital synthesis within its grasp. Indeed, it

⁷⁹ This is influential for the alternative indigenous histories I offer in section 6.1 (see pp. 226-238).

⁸⁰ This resonates with Mignolo's (2005: 165) description of the Aymara concept of *Pachakuti*. *Pacha* is the energetic pulsation of space and time, from which life radiates. *Kuti* is a violent rupture, akin to a revolution in Western thought. These concepts together reflect how indigenous people probably felt during the process of colonisation.

enacts a sense of inner ecstasy in Connie.

It is fitting that following this scene, a collective danced rite starts outside in the main square. In a similar way to the collective danced scene in Woolf's novel, which I described earlier (see pp. 93-96), many movement configurations are celebrated, not just the dyad: 'People were beginning to dance alone, in couples, in small and large circles... The music was subtle over a strong beat and a counterbeat: rhythm crossing rhythm...' (*ibid*: 183). Jackrabbit, one of Luciente's lovers, embodies Dionysian ecstasy: 'Jackrabbit moved wild and loose and explosive. Bolivar was a little too controlled' (*ibid*: 184). Meanwhile, Erzulia dances her own dance, lost in a trance: 'Erzulia was dancing alone, gone into an absorbed passionate trance state where nothing lived but her and the music centered around the throbbing drums' (*ibid*). Connie begins to fade away from Luciente. To save her, Luciente brings Connie out on the dance floor. Connie insists that she does not know Luciente's dancing style but Luciente highlights the *enjoyment* of the process. "Any way you feel like. It's for pleasure" (*ibid*). Connie closes her eyes and finds herself lost in the music. This differs considerably from her last experience of dancing, whilst interned in a mental institution, with the black and Latino patients 'watching each other trying to boogaloo so zonked with Thorazine they could hardly do the zombie shuffle' (*ibid*). Thus, Connie experiences a Dionysian rite of collective ecstasy in Mattapoisett, where no chemical inducement is required. Furthermore, she gets to the heart of her Latin American heritage, where rhythm represents vital life and is a symbol for historical transformation.

The Dionysian festivities of that evening set Connie's call to action in motion. In chapter 11, she escapes from Rockmore. Connie is captured and brought back to the hospital, where unfortunately she is operated on. Yet, in chapter 16, she escapes back to Mattapoisett. Unfortunately, Jackrabbit has been killed, but dance enables a celebration of his life. Erzulia dances and *becomes* Jackrabbit, in an act of ethical opening, which resonates with Braidotti's (2006) nomadic subjectivity:

She danced Jackrabbit. Yes, she became him. She was tall, bony but graceful, shambling and limber, young and awkward and beautiful, talented and bumbling, pressing off at once in four directions, hopping, leaping, charging, and bounding back' (*ibid*: 316).

Through Jackrabbit's death and the vibrancy of Erzulia's dance, Connie takes charge of her situation. She obtains poison on a visit to her brother, who had got her interned. At the end of the novel, she unleashes the poison on the doctors and awaits her fate. We are left with Connie's patient report, which indicates that she is still interned at Rockmore. Although this may seem bleak, Connie has waged a war and thus I see it as a triumph. She has internalised a collective spirit and this has enacted a sustainable future, since she can reach it whenever she escapes to Mattapoissett. Although still incarcerated, Connie is dancing on the edge of time.⁸¹

Towards the Zorbital Imaginary

Both Woolf's and Piercy's novels explore the Western conquest of Latin America and the colonisation of women's bodies, whilst looking to ethical worlds where collective ecstatic movement brings about social change. Both evoke a threefold process, which is integral to what I suggest here is the Zorbital. As both texts highlight, an initial vulnerability wrought by constraining societal structures and institutions is turned to inner ecstasy, and collective ecstatic motion. Yet, it is ultimately through the internalisation of a transformative collective spirit that sustainable futures are enabled.

These points provide a strong conceptual groundwork for reconfiguring female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. Through the danced movements I have highlighted, the protagonists gain a sense of ecstasy, which enables them to articulate their distinctive libidinal economies. In Rachel's case, subjective transformations are enacted by a particular danced scene, which ends in a collective ecstatic rite. As a result, Rachel falls in love with Terence, whilst still being able to hold her desire for something beyond the love of one person. Although Rachel physically dies, one has the sense that her vital spirit lives on,

⁸¹ This corresponds to Zorbital Flow 5 (see pp. 271-272).

as she dances at the edge of sea and sky. Meanwhile, in Piercy's novel, the Dionysian collective danced rites of Mattapoissett enable Connie to take control of her situation in the present and to look to sustainable futures, regardless of her imprisonment.

In the next section, I continue this exploration by examining how dance offers a framework for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. I firstly examine Stravinsky's seminal ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1913) and then offer an alternative configuration, by drawing on the narrative of the twentieth-century African American dancer, Katherine Dunham, who undertook anthropological fieldwork in the Caribbean. Finally, I work towards a dance framework, which highlights the vital life of the body in intentional movement, and thus enables us to rethink female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality.

3.2 - Reconfiguring Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*

In the previous section, I showed how danced scenes in literature enable one to view women's asexuality in a positive light. Yet, as this section will highlight, what we find in dance history is rather different, since here the image of the woman dancing herself to death is equated to a negative portrayal of asexuality. The history of dance is thus resigned to keeping women in positions of vulnerability, even when we move individually or collectively. I will begin this dance genealogy by firstly examining a work that explores the theme of the woman 'dancing herself to death.'⁸² Stravinsky's (1913) ballet, *The Rite of Spring*. This work has been significant in my journey with regards to (a)sexualities. I came to it whilst studying for my Music undergraduate degree, at a time where I was querying my identity. It set my musings on asexuality in motion, which I would subsequently extend when I viewed dance performances

⁸² This theme is evidenced in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy story, *The Red Shoes* (1845). As the old soldier tells the little girl in the story, whose red shoes keep making her dance against her will: 'Dance you shall,' said he, "dance in your red shoes till you are pale and cold, till your skin shrivels up and you are a skeleton! Dance you shall, from door to door, and where proud and wicked children live you shall knock, so that they may hear you and fear you! Dance you shall, dance—!" See: http://hca.gilead.org.il/red_shoe.html.

of the work.⁸³ Stravinsky's *Rite* is relevant for working towards Zorbitality, as it evokes a collective danced rite of sexuality. Yet the fundamental question remains: 'whether this ballet is about community or about sexuality' (Banes 1998: 105). I will here unpick the misogynist elements that underpin the sacrificial dance of the young virgin ('The Chosen One'), looking to its original performance. I will then offer an alternative conception grounded in inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion, by drawing on Katherine Dunham's *Rites de Passage* (1941). Dunham, a skilled choreographer and anthropologist, reconfigured both Afro-diasporic dance and the dancing female body. By drawing on her trajectory, I aim to deconstruct patriarchal constraints on the dancing female body, whilst highlighting the powerful role of Afro-diasporic rhythms in enabling women to develop their own choreographic empires.

Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*

Stravinsky's (1913) ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (*Le Sacre du Printemps*), premiered at the Théâtre des Champs Élysées, Paris, on 29 May 1913. Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* performed the work, with costumes and scenery by Roerich, and choreography by Nijinsky. In the original performance, the male elders of an imagined Russian pagan community chose a girl ('The Chosen One') as a sacrificial offering, watching her '... dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring' (Stravinsky 1975 [1935]: 31).⁸⁴ Garafola (1998: 72) mentions ancient Aztec sacrificial rituals as a possible influence for Stravinsky's rite, as well as the dominant trend of seeing women as primitive beings at that time (see Freud 2001 [1905]). As Berg (1988: 50) notes, the girl is not chosen specifically by her community, but rather by nature, a force beyond her control. Yet, the activities leading to this death dance stratify gender roles in such a way that it will always be a girl that is chosen.⁸⁵ She is a vulnerable subject.

⁸³ I viewed Kenneth MacMillan's (1962) version on 24 March 2012 (London Coliseum) and Sasha Waltz's (2013) production on 13 November 2015 (Sadler's Wells, London).

⁸⁴ Many dancers have noted the physical endurance required for the role as 'Chosen' virgin. Lydia Sokolova, who danced the role in Massine's (1920) adaptation of Nijinsky's choreography, stated that: 'Whatever it did to the audience it nearly killed me' (Sokolova 1960: 166).

⁸⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of Stravinsky's original conception, see Banes (1998: 100-108) and Berg (1988: 48-50).

The work is written in two parts. In the first, an old woman enters and begins to tell the future.⁸⁶ The rival tribes play games,⁸⁷ and then the girls dance a circle dance.⁸⁸ The rival tribes dance to celebrate the arrival of spring,⁸⁹ before an ancient sage kisses the earth.⁹⁰ This part ends in a danced orgy, where all the dancers become one with the earth.⁹¹ In the second part, the young maiden is chosen from a mystic circle, after she trips.⁹² The other women surround her, teaching the Chosen One her death dance,⁹³ while she remains frozen on the spot. The girls then evoke the ancestors and the Chosen One attempts to flee the circle.⁹⁴ Subsequently, the Chosen One is groomed for the sacrifice by the male elders⁹⁵ and ultimately ‘dances herself to death,’⁹⁶ thus metaphorically marrying Yarilo, the sun god, ruler of spring’ (Banes 1998: 102). The elders lift her to the skies.

As Hill (2000: vii) remarks of Stravinsky’s *Rite*, it was a masterpiece of the twentieth century, which broke totally with the past of Classical music, whilst remaining deeply ‘rooted in tradition.’ Its combination of folk melodies, atonal writing, accents, and polyrhythms⁹⁷ created a sense of freedom and vitality, which offers some groundwork for Zorbitality as a twenty-first century conceptual framework grounded in transformative rhythms. The *Rite* caused quite a riot at the time, as its primitive dancing style disturbed many, as did its dissonant music. Perhaps even more of a challenge though, as noted by Banes (1998: 105), was the way the work connected sexuality and sexual reproduction with community. In its original choreographic context, the evocation of a pagan culture required a dance language that went far beyond what had been

⁸⁶ This scene is titled *Augurs of Spring*.

⁸⁷ *Ritual of Abduction*.

⁸⁸ *Spring Rounds*.

⁸⁹ *Ritual of the Rival Tribes*.

⁹⁰ *Procession of the Sage*.

⁹¹ *Dance of the Earth*.

⁹² *Mystic Circles of the Young Girls*.

⁹³ *Glorification of the Chosen One*.

⁹⁴ *Evocation of the Ancestors*.

⁹⁵ *Ritual Action of the Ancestors*.

⁹⁶ *Sacrificial Dance*.

⁹⁷ Polyrhythm refers to two or more different rhythms being played simultaneously.

previously prescribed within Classical ballet. Instead, the movements were angular and feet were turned in, which in Hodson's (1996: xix) words 'suggested vulnerability but also autonomy.'

The work offers Zorbital possibilities. Firstly, it creates a gender-neutral choreographic language, where collective movement is the driving force and dyadic formations do not feature prominently (Banes 1998). Secondly, the work's rhythmic ingenuity has been continually renewed and experimented with by various choreographers, and thus defies one univocal representation. This sense of experimentation has a genealogical connection with the Caribbean as a site of hybridity (Hall 2001 [1995]) and Zorbitality as a libidinal economy grounded in transformation, movement and collective ecstasy.⁹⁸ Yet, I argue that no interpretation has succeeded in challenging the patriarchal nature of the work itself,⁹⁹ for the Chosen 'virgin' is a construct of the twentieth-century male gaze (Banes 1998). Zorbitality contends that a young woman can dance herself to life rather than death. She is not an asexual robot, motionless and jerked to life beyond her control.¹⁰⁰ If I were to choreograph the *Rite*, I would therefore see it as an articulation of the *Dithyrambos*, which Fraleigh (1987: 81) describes as a 'ritual spring song of the birth and rebirth of Dionysus.' To stage this rebirth, I will now draw on Katherine Dunham's *Rites de Passage* (1941), where she reconfigured Stravinsky's *Rite* through West African collective dance. This example was chosen, since Dunham's work allows us to rethink gender relations within the collective, as well as the role of the Chosen One.¹⁰¹ Admittedly, I am

⁹⁸ A further connection between Stravinsky's *Rite* and Latin America is evidenced in *La Consecración de la Primavera* (1998 [1978]), a novel by the Cuban musicologist and writer, Alejo Carpentier. In this work, Carpentier reconfigures Stravinsky's *Rite* through magical realism. As Chornik (2011) asserts, Carpentier chose both this work and method to represent innovative aesthetic ideas and the radical political convictions of the Cuban Revolution. The central character, Vera White, develops her own choreography for the *Rite*, which she seeks to stage with untrained Afro-Cuban dancers in Cuba. Vera also decides that the sacrifice of the Chosen One is deeply rooted in the present. I will draw on Vera's vision in Martha's memory in section 6.3 (see pp. 246-254),

⁹⁹ Bausch's (1975) version was the only one that came close (see Hao Hoang Song 2016).

¹⁰⁰ I will explore this in section 6.3 (pp. 246-254).

¹⁰¹ Another possible casting choice for the Chosen One is the *pahlikmana kachina* of indigenous Hopi and Zuni culture. Hopi and Zuni peoples reside in settlements called *pueblos* in the Southwestern states of the US. Although *kachina* dancers are predominantly male, the *pahlikmana kachina* is a female dancer. Transformation is central to her role, enabled both through her performances in the real world, and her symbolic role as the 'The Butterfly Maiden,'

not going to provide a detailed account of this work but rather I will draw on it as part of my analytic method. I have deconstructed Stravinsky's *Rite* and now I will *reconstruct* it through secondary sources, in a way that appeals to the Zorbital structure of this thesis, with its various firing points and interweaving genealogies. I will finally use Dunham's vision to put forward a framework for viewing female (a)sexualities through dance.

Reconfiguring the Rite through Zorbitality: Katherine Dunham's *Rites de Passage*

At the heart of Western dance history lies an aesthetic-historic tension, whereby dance is a manifestation of both expressiveness and form (Fraleigh 1987). From the late nineteenth century, women dancers/choreographers, began moving away from the constraints of Classical ballet, which had created 'an established hierarchy of movement' (*ibid*: xxv), characterised by a desire for uniformity, verticality, turned-out feet and simple romantic themes. In contrast, late nineteenth century female choreographers began to use imagination, freedom and human creativity to disrupt an established order, thus embodying 'dynamic transition rather than balanced stasis' (*ibid*: xxxviii). The shift was significant, as modern dance sought not to disrupt individual movement styles, regardless of dance technique. Furthermore, as Fraleigh (*ibid*: 141) notes, it had a generally Expressionist focus, which embodied a 'Dionysian, earthly, female, and existentially open essence.' These features form a genealogical connection with Zumba as a twenty-first century Dionysian rite, whose life spirit acts as a metaphor for Zorbitality. They also demonstrate a powerful transformation from vulnerability to inner ecstasy, the first and second Zorbital processes, as women found their own ways of moving.

Loïe Fuller's flowing movements, evoked in her famous *Serpentine Dance* (1890), revolutionised both the use of time and space in dance, as well as the

who represents springtime rejuvenation (see Schaafsma 1994). Interestingly, Martha Graham drew on her travels through New Mexico in her 1983 version of Stravinsky's *Rite* (see Berg 1988: 141-151). Yet, her interpretation was misogynist, provoking Goldberg (1986: 17) to assert that it 'was essentially a well-dressed rape onstage...' I challenge Graham's vision by naming the character of my alternative sacrificial dance 'Martha,' who we will meet in section 6.3 (see pp. 246-254). Martha's dance will metaphorically reference the *pahlikmana kachina*, although a reconfiguration of the African colonial subject will be its main focus.

role of the female dancer. Swirling the fabric of a balloon-like dress around her, she created a sense of eternal movement and life, which Hanna (2010: 226) asserts had an asexual synthesis. Light and colour were central to the work's conception, as well as the dominance of the spiral design, a symbol of renewal and transformation in Amerindian cultures. Meanwhile, Isadora Duncan was inspired by the ideals of Ancient Greece, thus reflecting the Dionysian spirit of Zorbitality. She was a strong advocate of women's liberation and explored many alternative roles for women. In *Revolutionary Etude* (1921), Duncan emphasised the importance of women gaining liberation from both constraints on their physical bodies and static social roles, through ecstatic movement.¹⁰² Thus, I concur with Fraleigh that at its root, modern dance was founded on 'a feminist liberation of the body and its belief in a free range of expression' (Fraleigh 1987: 145). It challenged male/ female stereotypes and opened up many possibilities for the body.

A notable twentieth-century figure in dance history is Katherine Dunham, an anthropologist and dancer who conducted fieldwork in the Caribbean. She is an important figure for this thesis, as her experiences in the French Caribbean profoundly transformed her. Her work resonates strongly with the emergent concept of Zorbitality, as throughout her career she both looked to Dionysian rites (*With My Red Fires* [1936]) and celebrated Afro-diasporic rhythms (*Rites de Passage* [1941]). Thus, her trajectory innately stages the journey from inner ecstasy to the internalisation of a collective ecstatic spirit. In particular, *Rites de Passage* acts as a reconceptualisation of Stravinsky's *Rite*, grounded in Dunham's initiation into the *vaudun* faith in Haiti.¹⁰³ It features four sections of variable order: 'Puberty,' 'Fertility Rite,' 'Death' and 'Women's Mysteries.' In Dunham's vision, a Matriarch controls proceedings, thus reflecting the perceived matriarchal nature of West African society (Banes 1998: 151).¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰² For more on the work of Fuller and Duncan, see Banes (1998: 66-80).

¹⁰³ *Vaudun* is a religion that was developed by West African slaves in Haiti in the eighteenth century, when their faith was being suppressed. It is based around a devotion to Bondye, who is accessed through various spirits called *loa*.

¹⁰⁴ Admittedly, I have not seen a performance of the work. It is notoriously difficult to find performances of Dunham's work, either live or online. Instead, I draw on Banes's (1998) and

Fertility Rite is of particular note. In Dunham's vision, the matriarch sets this rite in motion. Like Stravinsky's, it is a communal affair. The young women of the community harvest the grain. The men play games, making thrusting gestures, as the maiden (The Chosen One) stands with one arm on her hip. The sacrificial dance is one of mutual exchange. The Chosen couple rock their pelvises back and forth, in synchrony, while the other couples copy them. The music builds to a crescendo, with the man in the central couple raising the woman up. Burt (2001: 84) argues that this configuration is a symbol of Western ballet (the *pas de deux*), combined with West African pelvic movement. Yet, the synthesis has a collective nature, as the woman does not dance herself to death. Couples engage in the rite together. Thus, Dunham's work enacts a journey from inner ecstasy to collective ecstatic motion.

A number of comments can be made on Dunham's work, which suggests a basis for Zorbitality. Firstly, the women in her production exude a sense of strength, thus reflecting the perceived matriarchal society she is depicting. Secondly, the gestures depicted would not be seen as 'sexual' in African society, since pelvic thrusts are common in West African dance. As Dunham (in Lloyd 1949: 245) asserted: 'African movement is pelvic movement, natural and unself-conscious. It becomes erotic on the stages of civilization.' Finally, Burt (2001: 80) rightly asserts that Dunham's work embodies 'a modernist ideal of freedom and liberation,' since she was an African American woman working within the confines of a conservative white society. Dunham enacted the possibilities of what Gilroy (1995) refers to as 'the Black Atlantic,' which calls for a radically reoriented view of modernity. This approach looks back to how enslaved people drew on Western ideologies, which 'then flowed into social movements of an anti-colonial and decidedly anti-capitalist type' (Gilroy 2004: 44). Indeed, Dunham staged this when she drew on the resources of the Caribbean to create her own choreographic vision. She thoroughly internalised the spirit of collective ecstasy she experienced in her initiation into *vaudun* and this was key to her transformation. In Kabir's (2015c: 18) words, she 'recovered the

Burt's (2001) accounts of *Rites de Passage*, which may act as firing points within this Zorbital genealogy.

embodied memory of transcolonial rhythmic and kinetic collaborations arising from the Plantation to articulate her own sense of community and place within it.' In summary, Dunham's work offers three key ingredients, which offer groundwork for a Zorbital view of sexuality: strength and creative agency, new movement formations based on Afro-diasporic rhythms and a questioning of the established rules.¹⁰⁵ With these points in mind, I will now further define a Zorbital view of dance, before turning to the suppression of collective Dionysian rites in section 3.3.

Towards a Zorbital framework for dance

In his work on clubbing culture, Jackson (2004) makes a number of problematic remarks that this thesis seeks to undo. Whilst I value his assertion that dancing 'unleashes the Dionysian body from the Apollonian constraints imposed upon it in the everyday world' (*ibid*: 15), he moves on to describe dance as 'the next best thing to sex' (*ibid*: 21). This perspective devalues the role of collective ecstatic motion as a *centralising* force of a distinctive feminine libidinal economy. Dance should also not be seen as an act of 'sexual sublimation,' as Hanna (2010: 229-229) problematically suggests. Rather, as I will describe, the intentional moving body offers new possibilities for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality.

In *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics*, Fraleigh (1987) explores the vital lived experiences of the body moving within time and space. Although her research focuses specifically on dance as an art form, her insights offer conceptual tools for a Zorbital analytic framework. Fraleigh's basic thesis is that dance is 'a sign for life' (*ibid*: xvii), an expression of our vital body, its agency and intention. Movement/dance focuses on our present embodiment, makes us feel whole and more than ourselves, especially when experienced in a communal context (*ibid*). In essence, dance cannot be removed from our experience of life. Even if we are not trained dancers, we all move within time and space. We are constantly dancing. Furthermore, as Fraleigh suggests,

¹⁰⁵ Other Dunham works that are useful for a Zorbital analysis include *L'Ag'ya* and *Little Sambo* (both 1938). See Kabir's (2015c) article, which examines these works in relation to postcolonial studies.

dance is a state of becoming, much like the construction of identity. As sexual orientation is an aspect of our identities and lived experiences, it can never be fully removed from dance. With this in mind, I will now describe lived-body theory, which draws on Merleau-Ponty's (2002 [1945]) theory of the body-subject and body-object, as a conceptual tool for Zorbital analysis.

Since the time of Descartes (1596-1650), the mind and body have been seen as separate entities. Equally, the human soul, which in previous times had played an important role in maintaining a democratic relationship between the sexes, gradually became diminished (Riley 1987). Yet, lived-body theory allows us to overcome such dualisms and to situate the vital spirit of the moving female body. Fraleigh (1987: 13) puts forward lived-body theory as an important description of movement: 'Embodiment is not passive; it is articulate. In other words, I live my body as a body-of-motion, just as I also live my self in motion.'

Key to this conception is Merleau-Ponty's (2002 [1945]) distinction between the body-subject and the body-object. The body-subject is a 'pre-reflective consciousness' that is lived spontaneously in 'the present moment' (Fraleigh 1987: 14). Most significantly, it is not 'an agency that moves the body, since it is synonymous with the body (*ibid*). This contrasts with the body-object, as the body reflected upon and judged. Sartre (1984 [1943]: 445-459) holds an essentially negative view of the body-object, suggesting that the gaze of the other objectifies us and leads to an awareness of our alienation from others. Yet, as the Zorbital framework of this thesis attests, we can surpass vulnerability through embodied collective ecstatic motion and furthermore, through the internalisation of a joyful collective spirit. This is embodied in the emergent concept of Zorbitality, a resistant imaginary that enables us to reconfigure female (a)sexualities through transformative movement.

The following two sections together work towards Zorbitality. Section 3.3 begins with a momentary glimpse of the collective ecstasy of Dionysian rites. Yet, a primary vulnerability quickly emerges, as I trace the suppression of Dionysus via the rise of Christianity and Western colonisation of the 'New'

World. This briefly turns to inner ecstasy through the rhythmic possibilities offered by the fusion of Amerindian, European and African musical styles in the years following colonisation. Yet, the emergence of the dyad as the 'natural' configuration of Latin social dance did not enable the full Zorbital process. In section 3.4, I show how inner ecstasy can be transformed to collective ecstatic motion, by describing Zumba as a twenty-first century collective ecstatic rite. Zumba harnesses the joyous flow of Dionysus and the power of deconstructed Afro-diasporic social dances, whilst drawing on the resources of capitalism and globalisation. I will argue that an internalisation of its collective spirit is vital for a reconfiguration of female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality.

3.3 - Situating Zumba: Western colonisation and the loss of collective ecstasy

Evoking Dionysus

In *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (2007), Ehrenreich succinctly argues that a missing element of twenty-first century life is the sense of collective ecstasy that was found in danced rituals of centuries past. Images of dancers were painted on stone long before there was any written language, even if they appeared only as stick figures. Dance was clearly more than just a liminal activity and as Ehrenreich (*ibid*: 30) suggests, may have been a way of connecting with non-human others. This is evidenced in Mesopotamian, Greek, Indian and Palestinian iconography from about 5000 years ago, which featured humans hunting animals, whilst wearing masks, drumming, beating sticks and dancing in circular formations (*ibid*).

It was the ancient Greeks who valued collective danced rituals most, as manifested in the transformative spirit of Dionysus, the mythical god of collective ecstasy, who had a cult following approximately 3500-2500 years ago. Dionysus was an androgynous and apparently 'asexual' figure, the god of *ekstasis*, who transported his followers beyond themselves (Storm 1998). Jameson (1993) devotes a chapter to the asexuality of Dionysus, describing him as 'detached and unconcerned with sex' (*ibid*: 44). Furthermore, as Storm (1998) asserts, Dionysus had both creative and destructive tendencies, and

representations of him have evolved over time.¹⁰⁶ He is the god of ‘myriad selves’ (*ibid*: 9), resulting from ‘a consolidation of tendencies and effects that transcends both geographical and historical boundaries’ (*ibid*: 10). Most significantly, Dionysus is ‘a collective identity’ (*ibid*: 11), characterised by birth and rebirth, fragmentation and resassemblage.¹⁰⁷ The spatial and temporal shattering that Dionysus evokes thus resonates with this thesis’s focus on historical transformation and collective movement as the basis of an alternative feminine libidinal economy.

Devotees of Dionysus held many events, where dancing rituals were key, and people danced themselves into a state of trance. Animal sacrifice was also practiced. Women were particular devotees, emerging in the tradition of *Maenadism*, which referred to ‘the Greek women’s frenzied worship of Dionysus’ (Ehrenreich 2007: 36). Maenadism occurred two times a year, and interestingly not in spring, since these were not fertility rites. Equally, they were neither sexual rites, nor rites of drunken debauchery. As King Pentheus in Euripides’ Greek tragedy, *The Bacchae* (1960 [405 BC]) highlighted, men drank alcohol but women did not use any chemical inducement or engage in any sexual behaviour: ‘... they [the maenads] were not drunk on wine, as you told us, or with music of flutes; nor was there any love-making in the loveliness of the woods’ (*ibid*: 202). Most significantly, what emerges from the Dionysian rite is that the Ancient Greeks’ sense of collective joy was *not* of a sexual nature (Ehrenreich 2007: 39). Dionysus’s ‘asexuality’ created an ethical openness to others, where his devotees could be possessed by his transcendent spirit.

Unfortunately, in the centuries that followed, Dionysianism got lost in translation.¹⁰⁸ For instance, in ancient Rome, Dionysus was renamed *Bacchus* and seen to be merely a fun-loving god of wine. With the rise of Christianity, the sentiment of communion with a transcendent spirit was rendered subservient

¹⁰⁶ He is sometimes represented as an androgynous youth, sometimes as a bearded old man.

¹⁰⁷ In mythology, Dionysus’s body was dismembered and reassembled in spring, another countering narrative to Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*.

¹⁰⁸ As Porter (2000: 6) highlights, ‘Dionysianism’ is a ‘modern’ concept. Thus, I consciously draw on it as a contemporary analytic tool.

to reaching salvation with one nameable God. The expulsion of dancing from the Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries led to people taking their ecstatic rituals to the streets, and thus a time and space was created for 'Carnival,' which emerged from the thirteenth century. Yet, something had been lost: 'a certain "secularization" of communal pleasure' (Ehrenreich 2007: 93) had been enacted. Furthermore, as I will now argue, the devaluation of collective ecstasy was intricately connected with Western colonisation of the 'New' World and the devaluation of collective traditions. Through what Mignolo (2005: 8) describes as 'the colonial wound'¹⁰⁹ inflicted upon indigenous populations, a primary vulnerability was enacted, where collective ecstatic motion was stifled.¹¹⁰ Yet, the following musings will trace the journey from vulnerability to inner ecstasy, through the gradual fusion of Amerindian, European and African musical and danced traditions.

Western colonisation and the suppression of Dionysus

As is commonly cited, Christopher Columbus reached what we know today as the Caribbean on 12 October 1492.¹¹¹ In total, he would engage in four voyages, which began an age of exploration, where Central and Latin America were founded and colonised by various *conquistadores*.¹¹² Portuguese, French, English and Dutch colonisers carved up the remainder of these lands. Approximately one third of indigenous tribes had been wiped out by 1518 (Calvo Ospina 1995: 5).¹¹³ In particular, the colonisers abhorred both the African slaves' and indigenous populations' love of music and began to use music as a form of control. For example: in 1614, the Bishop of Lima called for

¹⁰⁹ Mignolo discusses this in relation to Fanon's (1965 [1961]) book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, which describes the dehumanising impact of colonisation on the individual and the nation.

¹¹⁰ This could be described as a Reverse Zorbital Process. See Zorbital Flow 4 (pp. 270-271) and my respondents' memories in section 5.1 (pp. 186-191).

¹¹¹ This history needs to be challenged, since there is much evidence to suggest that Polynesian, Asian and African people engaged in peaceful voyages to and between Mesoamerica, millennia before Columbus engaged in his voyage of 'discovery' (see Riley, Kelley, Pennington and Rands 2012). I will return to this point in section 6.1.

¹¹² Hernán Cortés colonised Mexico in 1521 and Francisco Pizarro colonised Peru in 1531-2.

¹¹³ As Anzaldúa (1999: 27) notes, prior to the conquest there were 25 million Indian people in Mesoamerica. In the immediate aftermath, this became 7 million. By 1650, due to a smallpox epidemic brought from Europe, only 1.5 million remained.

the destruction of all indigenous instruments (Slonimsky 1945: 47).¹¹⁴ The colonisers brought Church and popular music with them, as well as courtly couple dances, such as the *minuet* and the *quadrille*, which would proliferate from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.¹¹⁵ These would fuse with African traditions, as at least 12 million slaves were brought to the new colonies from West Africa from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, to work primarily on sugar plantations (Segal 1995: 4). Significantly, couple dance did not feature in the African tradition, where collective circle dance to the beat of the drum was central.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the drum would become a symbol for resistance amongst African Slaves in the New World. Yet, it was also seen as a dangerous emblem, inciting slave revolt (Fryer 2000). As Chasteen (2004: 13) asserts: ‘... something new and powerful happened when couple dancing met the liberation of the lower body to create the dance-of-two.’ Indeed, I would suggest that the fusion of indigenous, European and African musical and danced traditions marked a shift from the vulnerability wrought by the colonial encounter to a sense of inner ecstasy. Yet, as I will later show in my discussion of Zumba, this process also devalued collective ecstasy as a valuable form of asexual expression, and served to naturalise the dyad (Ehrenreich 2007). Before this however, I will comment on the transformation of Afro-Caribbean musical genres in the centuries following colonisation.

In her chapter on dance and globalisation, Desmond (1998 [1993]) discusses how cultural studies speaks a lot about the representation of the human body but very little about its physical actions and movements. Indeed, there is a

¹¹⁴ For a comprehensive account of the suppression of indigenous musical traditions, see Smith (1948).

¹¹⁵ Significantly, these were not explicitly couple dances, but were rather set dances. Couples danced in lines and moved to different partners. Partner hold was not used (see Manuel 2009 for more on how these were creolized). The watershed moment occurred with the emergence of the waltz in nineteenth-century Europe, which was the first strictly defined couple dance (see Scott 2008). Significantly, it emerged at the very same moment as bourgeois capitalism. This marked a democratisation of the dance floor, which had the dyad at its core. The *polka* and *mazurka* added to this base. In Argentina, the most European-dominated Latin American country, the tango also emerged as a dance strictly for couples. The black influence in tango is often denied, but it is in fact a fusion of European couple dance and African rhythm (see Dom Pedro’s 2013 film, *Tango Negro: The African Roots of Tango*). For a comprehensive history of tango, see Savigliano (1995) and Farris Thompson (2006). See also autobiographical passage 7 (pp. 167-169 of this thesis).

¹¹⁶ For more on Bantu circle dance, see Farris Thompson (2006).

paucity of research on ‘the complex effects of the commodification of movement styles, their migration, modification, quotation, adoption, or rejection as part of the larger production of social identities through physical enactment...’ (*ibid*: 155). As mentioned earlier, the four basic rhythms of Zumba are merengue,¹¹⁷ salsa,¹¹⁸ cumbia¹¹⁹ and reggaeton,¹²⁰ with many different Afro-Caribbean and world genres now featuring. Whilst this mish-mash of dance styles may seem to resemble ‘fusion food,’ as a seminar student of mine remarked, this fusion perhaps draws attention to the fact that various Afro-diasporic dances in Latin America have relationships with each other, that these dances fuse different styles which are given local colour wherever they migrate, and may in turn have involved from non-danced ways of using the body.¹²¹ Indeed, as Den Tandt and Young (2004) highlight, unlike Western music, the history of Latin American music cannot be traced in a straight line, thus creating a metaphor for reconceptualising female (a)sexualities via Zorbitality: as an amorphous process that is constantly moving and evolving, defying stable classification across epochs. This is reflected in Madrid and Moore’s (2013: 8) deconstruction of the term ‘musical genre,’ where genres are viewed as ‘dynamic, socially defined categories in constant dialogue with broader social processes and transformed structurally and/or conceptually according to the needs of the moment.’ Madrid and Moore’s musings offer a conceptual framework for Zorbitality’s celebration of multiple rhythmic configurations, as they argue that people’s ideas about genres are too fixed and fail to acknowledge how they evolve *over time* and *in context*, through experimentation.

¹¹⁷ Merengue is a march, which developed in the Dominican Republic. Its shuffling foot movements supposedly derive from black slaves with their feet in chains. See Austerlitz (1997), *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity*.

¹¹⁸ See Boggs (1992), *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the evolution of Salsa in New York City*; and Calvo Ospina (1995), *Salsa!: Havana Beat, Bronx Beat*.

¹¹⁹ Cumbia started as a courtship dance, danced often by African populations on the Caribbean coasts of Panama and Colombia, which gradually became infused with European and Amerindian elements. See Vila and Fernández L’Hoeste (2013), *Cumbia!: Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre*.

¹²⁰ Reggaeton originated in the underground scene of Puerto Rico in the 1990s. It incorporated rap, hip-hop and reggae, thus reflecting the influence of US culture. It was often associated with drugs and violence. Several government-sponsored record store raids took place in San Juan in the 1990s. Yet, the genre has become more popular in the early twenty-first century. See Rivera, Marshall and Pacini Hernandez (Eds.) (2009), *Reggaeton*.

¹²¹ See Daniel (2011), *Caribbean Atlantic Diaspora Dance: Igniting Citizenship* (pp. 189-196).

The emergence of *salsa* in 1970s New York, a genre that amalgamated rhythms of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and resulted from Latino/a migration to and from the US, is testament to this process of transformation. It embodies the transition between the vulnerability wrought by the colonial encounter and a sense of inner ecstasy forged through the creative merging of different traditions. As Aparicio (1998: 90) asserts, *salsa* is a multi-layered genre and cannot be reduced to the narrative of one place. Whilst *salsa* drew on Latino rhythms, Fania Records, led by Johnny Pacheco and Jerry Masucci, marketed it in New York City. Thus, through its relationship with capitalist enterprises and globalisation, I argue that it is a genealogical referent of Zumba. The spirit of *salsa* and by extension, Zumba, is a metaphor for channelling how we might begin to think of (a)sexualities through Zorbitality: in a spirit of eternal transformation. If we fail to undo the stereotypes surrounding genres and identities, then we devalue 'processes, performance, and individual agency' (Madrid and Moore 2013: 10). Having briefly explored the relationship between colonisation and the suppression of collective ecstasy, and the role of globalisation in the emergence of Latin genres in the twentieth century, I will now examine the relationship between collective ecstasy and sexuality.

The relationship between collective ecstasy and sexuality

An interesting aspect of Ehrenreich's (2007) theory is that Western colonisers often associated dancing rituals with sexual consummation. Yet, these rituals often did not end in private or public sexual acts. For the colonisers, this was disturbing. How could one experience collective ecstasy if it did not lead to sex? The emergent concept of Zorbitality addresses this point, by asserting that collective ecstasy is 'asexual.' It involves a shifting energy and connectivity amongst people, whilst allowing one to transcend one's self. As Ehrenreich (*ibid*: 13) succinctly writes: 'The self-loss that participants sought in ecstatic ritual was not through physical merger with another person but through a kind of spiritual merger with the group.' The Western world often cannot understand the love that may exist between members of a group, as opposed to the understanding of erotic love that exists between two human beings. This is because the concept of 'the Western world' emerged through a delinking of

collective ecstasy from asexual dance. As I discussed in my analysis of *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky enacted this shift through mythopoesis, where an artificial mythology was created that viewed sexuality as a collective rite. Zumba embodies this as a *lived* process, reflecting the ‘incommunicable thrill of the group deliberately united in joy and exaltation’ (*ibid*: 16).

Whilst Ehrenreich’s work is exemplary, she makes two problematic assumptions. Firstly, she assumes that not engaging in sexual activity is somehow less pleasurable than engaging in it, since one does not work towards reproduction and leaving a genetic trace:

Why should humans be rewarded so generously for moving bodies together in time? We are also pleasurable rewarded for sexual activity, and it is easy to figure out why: Individuals who fail to engage in sex, or heterosexual intercourse anyway, leave no genetic trace’ (*ibid*: 26).

This stance denies the creative potential of movement for its own sake, and the fact that a ‘genetic’ trace can be made through one’s movement both in present time and the life history one leaves. Ehrenreich’s remarks also have undertones of what Rich (1980) called compulsory heterosexuality, where sexualities misaligned with ‘natural’ reproduction are devalued. Equally, Ehrenreich sees erotic love for another as something that is innate and natural for all: ‘The capacity for collective joy is encoded into us almost as deeply as the capacity for the erotic love of one human for another’ (Ehrenreich 2007: 260). Yet, when looking back to Dionysian rites, it is evident that erotic love is not needed to reach a sense of transcendence.

Another problematic aspect of Ehrenreich’s theory is her assumption that collective movement rites unleash a repressed sexuality. For instance, in relation to the development of rock and roll in the US in the 1950s and 60s, she quotes Pratt (1990: 140), who described this as ‘the unleashing of generations of repressed sexuality.’ Yet, Ehrenreich’s theories can be critiqued in two ways. Firstly, looking to the origins of rock and roll, one of the main features was the ring-shout developed by African Christians, which involved foot stamping and hand clapping. This was essentially about an ecstasy of motion and spirit, which was then endorsed under the spirit of capitalism as ‘sexual liberation.’ Secondly,

Ehrenreich relies too much on Freud's conception of the libido, which seeks satisfaction in genital activity with others. Instead, we need to look to Plato's conception of *Eros* in his *Symposium* (c 385 BC), which is not based on physical and/or sexual attraction but rather on attraction in its ideal rather than carnal form. Thirdly, we need to re-examine the history of Carnival and its relationship with parody. In this way, the sexual and sensual dimensions of the movements I teach in a Zumba class poke fun at dominant sexualised motifs within culture, which I do not want to enact in my everyday interactions.

In concluding this section, I wish to highlight how Western 'progress' has devalued the legacy of Dionysus and the important tradition of collective ecstasy. We have 'completed the demonization of Dionysus begun by Christians centuries ago, and thereby rejected one of the most ancient sources of help – the mind-preserving, lifesaving techniques of ecstasy' (Ehrenreich 2007: 153). Yet, in working towards Zorbitality as a radical way of reviewing female (a)sexualities, we can rewrite this history. In the next section, I will navigate this possibility by showing how the twenty-first century Dionysian rite of Zumba has the power to subvert this erasure. It draws on the trauma of the colonial encounter, as well as the inner ecstasy enacted by the merging of African, European and indigenous traditions, and reconfigures them in terms of collective ecstatic motion. Yet, its status as a capitalist enterprise exists in tension with the collective joy of the lived Zumba experience.

3.4 - Dionysus meets neoliberalism: Reframing female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality

In this section, I draw on Zumba, the global Latin dance fitness programme¹²² that celebrates the historical transformation of Afro-diasporic rhythms, as a central example of Zorbitality. This section reaches the third Zorbital process of collective ecstatic motion, whilst highlighting how it can be internalised as a resistant imaginary. I firstly utilise Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) theory of 'flow'

¹²² It must be noted that Zumba has not reached some less developed countries yet. Furthermore, within developed cities, Zumba classes tend to be held in affluent areas.

and Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) 'rhizome' in order to extend the definition of Zorbitality set out in the introduction to this thesis (see pp. 16-19). Secondly, I examine Zumba as a contemporary Dionysian rite, describing how a sense of collective joy was built into Zumba's marketing strategy. Thirdly, I explore the tension between Zumba as a capitalist enterprise and the lived collective Zumba experience, by drawing on my insights from the ZIN (Zumba Instructor Network) Academy and 'Believe' after-party, both held in London from 10-11 July 2015, and my work as a Zumba Fitness instructor. Finally, I describe Zumba as (i) an asexual space, (ii) a celebration of the autoerotic body and (iii) an invocation of West African collective movement rites.

Structurally speaking, this section tests the boundaries of academic writing. Indeed, its structure could be said to be Zorbital, as it moves from Zorbitality as a reoriented female subjectivity, to Zumba as marketed collective joy, to my self-narrative. It also sets in motion the me-search of chapter 4. I have consciously chosen to begin my me-search in this section, as the structure of this thesis is rhizomatic, featuring multiple overlapping genealogies, which are deconstructed, reconstructed and performed anew. Thus, I will here open up the rhizome for the next set of dance moves, whilst highlighting the embodied textual practice of this thesis. As I take you now on this Zorbital journey, I ask you to dance with me. By the end, we may have come full circle.

Reaching Zorbitality

In *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness*, Csikszentmihalyi (1992) articulates a theory of flow, which could be seen as a contemporary interpretation of Dionysian thought. He describes flow as 'the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it' (*ibid*: 4). Csikszentmihalyi's words resonate strongly with Zumba, which expresses a sense of collective joy that transcends divides of gender, class and culture. Indeed, flow is a universal concept that can be transferred across generations and cultures, as a method of characterising the human channelling of psychic energy towards a goal. Yet, this goal is not deterministic; flow

moments are moments of ecstasy, which create a continual sense of happiness and integration in everyday life, and connect us with others through a shared community of interest. As Csikszentmihalyi describes, deriving enjoyment *in the present* is a universal marker of happiness across cultures, and this is what Zumba taps into, through its development of local and global communities. Yet, Csikszentmihalyi fails to fully examine how a flow experience can act as a resistant practice that enables one to transcend vulnerabilities in everyday life. Zorbitality's role as a resistant imaginary addresses this deficit.

Csikszentmihalyi views consciousness as a circular rather than linear process, involving a structure of attention and goals, mediated by the self: 'consciousness is not a strictly linear system, but one in which circular causality obtains' (*ibid*: 34). When acquired information threatens goals, a sense of 'psychic entropy' ensues (*ibid*: 37). However, when a flow experience occurs, 'the self is more *complex* than it had been before' (*ibid*: 41). Key to this process of growing complexity is the relationship between differentiation, which 'implies a movement toward uniqueness, toward separating oneself from others,' and integration as 'a union with other people, with ideas and entities beyond the self' (*ibid*). As Csikszentmihalyi notes, this process enables a thread of enjoyment to emerge, which weaves through individual and collective lives.¹²³ This is largely achieved through a 'freedom from the tyranny of time' (*ibid*: 67), where the linearity of clock time is transcended and lived time is enacted. Indeed, as I have experienced, this freedom allows us to navigate the relationship between inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion, which is central to Zumba as an embodied practice.¹²⁴

The contrast between pleasure and enjoyment, and the surpassing of linear time are also features of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004 [1980]). The rhizome interrogates the dominant images of the tree and root in the Western imaginary, which represent a search for origins and neat categories. It rejects any centralising force and binary logic. Instead, it

¹²³ Csikszentmihalyi (1992: 49-67) puts forward eight tenets of enjoyment.

¹²⁴ See *Zumba: Becoming My Dance* (pp. 172-173 of this thesis).

proposes that there are no orientating points, just lines of intensity, called 'lines of flight' (*ibid*: 4). Furthermore, the rhizome may be ruptured but can start again on an old line or a new one. It is not a structural model. Rather, via the concept of Schizoanalysis, it disavows origins and appropriate life 'stages,' and thus 'rejects any idea of a pretraced destiny, whatever name is given to it' (*ibid*: 14). Desire is the driving force of the rhizome, which may manifest itself in multiple ways.

Deleuze and Guattari engage in a radical rethinking of Western libidinal economy, as demonstrated in the concept of the plateau, which they derive from Bateson's (1972) work on Balinese sexual cultures. They describe the plateau as 'a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 [1980]: 24).¹²⁵ They highlight how Western sexuality has been subjugated to the reproductive model and without having to label it 'asexuality,' put forward a convincing rhizomatic theory, which eschews the Western world's focus on genitality in sexuality studies:

... the rhizome, on the other hand, is a liberation of sexuality not only from reproduction but also from genitality. Here in the West, the tree has implanted itself in our bodies, rigidifying and stratifying even the sexes. We have lost the rhizome, or the grass (*ibid*: 20).

This conception is encapsulated in their vision of 'the body without organs,' (*ibid*: 165-184) where movement and energy are transformed without the need for interpretation, via a flow of intensities. Equally, in their discussion of the inadequacy of orgasm as a centralising goal of human sexuality, the rhizome as a theory of eternal flow and interrelation between various lines of flight, offers a convincing alternative. Yet, what their theories lack is a connection with the *lived* experiences of people, who have to survive within constraining societal structures. Ultimately, their theories lie within a plane of abstraction and do not move beyond inner ecstasy. Zorbitality as a conceptual and analytical mode seeks to address this by theorising from experience outwards and showing how collective ecstatic motion can enable subjective transformation.

¹²⁵ This is influential for my Zorbital flow diagrams. See section 7.2 (pp. 267-272).

Climax is neither part of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the plateau nor Csikszentmihalyi's flow. Rather, these theories seek to bring forth 'a plane of consistency of desire' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 172), inscribed with continual flows of intensity. These flows 'go beyond constants,' embody a sense of becoming, and 'have neither culmination nor subject' (*ibid*: 558). In the process, joy itself is continuously replicated, as in the Zumba experience. This embodies:

... a joy that is immanent to desire as though desire were filled by itself and its contemplations, a joy that implies no lack or impossibility and is not measured by pleasure since it is what distributes intensities of pleasure and prevents them from being suffused by anxiety, shame, and guilt (*ibid*: 172).

The preceding elaborations provide a detailed conceptual framework for Zorbitality, where the lived Zumba experience acts as a grounding metaphor. I will now describe the emergence of Zumba Fitness as a twenty-first century lifestyle brand that captures the eternal transformation of Afro-Caribbean rhythms and a return to Dionysian danced rites of collective ecstasy.

Zumba as a lifestyle choice: Marketing collective joy

Zumba Fitness is a huge multinational company, with its headquarters in Hallandale Beach, Florida. In 2012, it was worth \$500 million and in the same year was voted American Company of the Year (Rusli 2012). The Zumba website (<https://www.zumba.com/en-US>) states that 15 million people attend Zumba classes at 200,000 locations worldwide, in 180 different countries. Whilst Zumba Fitness is a global phenomenon and a largely collaborative process between Latin American and Western artists/markets, its origins lie in the narrative of its creator, Alberto 'Beto' Perez. Beto was born in 1970 in Cali, a city on the Pacific coast of Colombia, which has been central to the transmigration of Latin music to the mainland US via Miami. Having immersed himself in many styles of dance, Beto also began teaching step aerobics classes in his teens. One day, Beto forgot his regular aerobics music CD. Arriving late for class, he resorted to using a salsa and merengue CD that he listened to usually for his own entertainment (Kabir 2015a). Never before had he considered using this music for a group fitness class. Yet, in that moment, as he

improvised the steps and saw smiles rippling across the faces of his class participants, he realised that this feeling needed to be bottled.

Undoubtedly, Zumba would not exist if Beto had not embarked on his own journey of discovery. In 1999, Beto decided to pursue the American dream and arrived in Miami, Florida, a city that had become synonymous with the transnationalisation of salsa but also Colombian drug trafficking. Blissfully unaware, Beto was 'bringing a very different kind of "drug" to the *Estados Unidos*' (Kabir 2015a: 3). Poor and with nowhere to stay, Beto resorted to sleeping on a park bench for two nights. He managed to find work teaching group fitness classes at gyms with wealthy clients. One of these was the mother of a young jobless entrepreneur, Alberto Perlman (*ibid*). She enjoyed Beto's classes so much that she encouraged her son to do business with him. In 2001, Perlman approached another entrepreneur, Alberto Aghion, and together the three Albertos developed the concept of 'Zumba Fitness,' which combines the four core Afro-diasporic dance styles of merengue, salsa, cumbia and reggaeton, and has gradually grown to incorporate a broader range of world music (*ibid*: 4).¹²⁶

As Kabir (2015a) notes, whilst recent studies have shown the health benefits of the Zumba Fitness programme as compared to other fitness regimes (see Luetgten, Foster, Doberstein, Mikat and Porcari 2012), virtually no research has examined Zumba 'as a social and cultural phenomenon' (Kabir 2015a: 1). This is surprising, for from its very beginnings, Zumba has been marketed as not only a product but also a *lifestyle choice*. This is reflected in the comment of a Zumba representative, Mr. Rowitch, quoted in Rusli (2012): 'Zumba is more than a fitness program; it's representative of a whole lifestyle and attitude.' Thus, Zumba works with a neoliberal economy, which capitalises on people's desires

¹²⁶ Without diminishing this endeavour, other musicians had previously engaged in a similar process. In December 1969, the Cuban musician, Juan Formell developed his own style called *songo*, which had a similar synthesis to Zumba. As Roy (2002: 159-160) asserts: 'Today, according to Juan Formell, no one invents new rhythms; people only combine already existing ones: *son*, *merengue*, reggae, *ranchera*, *shake*, pop, funk.' It seems like Beto's vision had been formulated a year before his birth! However, a crucial component affected *songo*'s emergence: due to the US embargo on Cuba, the US capitalist system.

to be part of a shared brand and concept. Similarly, Zumba Fitness's chief marketing officer, Jeffrey Perlman (quoted in Bruell 2012) stated the following: 'I wanted to turn Zumba into a brand where people felt that kind of free and electrifying joy.' In a 2016 interview (Pérez and Perlman 2016), Perlman specifically defined 'FEJ' (Free Electrifying Joy) as a distinctive component of the Zumba process. According to Perlman, this occurs 20 minutes into a Zumba class, where 'the person suddenly feels very liberated... everything that's in their life disappears and it's just them and the music.' This seems like an updated version of a Dionysian rite. Zumba is about bottling people's collective enjoyment, led by the Dionysian figure of Beto, but this time working within the spirit of the capitalist system.

By 2006, Perlman realised that Zumba had to capitalise on people's emotions. This change was brought about in response to his chance viewing of a poster for the David LaChapelle movie, *Rize*, which featured a man and woman experiencing the collective ecstasy of dance (Kabir 2015a). This was a eureka moment, as the three Albertos realised that Zumba was about collective joy, not weight loss, which was reflected in the emerging slogan: 'Ditch the workout; join the party.' This became Zumba's tagline, as they invested \$10,000 in a new website homepage with a Zumba lifestyle blog (Z-Life), branded clothing and the Zumba Instructor Network (ZIN) [*ibid*: 1].¹²⁷ The three Albertos would also enable Zumba teachers to become local entrepreneurs, by offering the possibility to sell Zumba wear via local markets.

From its inception as a global fitness regime, it was decided that Zumba would be inclusive of all body types in its marketing campaigns. The most important element was that the model looked like they were experiencing joy. As Perlman (quoted in Bruell 2012) remarked: 'Instead of the typical full-body shot of a

¹²⁷ Every two months Zumba instructors signed up to ZIN receive a ZIN volume with a CD featuring approximately twelve tracks. An accompanying DVD offers two choreographies for each song, one that was demonstrated at a live class with participants, and a second individual choreography, with notes. For the months in between, instructors are sent a Mega Mix CD, which contains selected Zumba hits. Previously, the CDs and DVDs were posted worldwide but since early Autumn 2015 a digital option has been made available. For an additional fee, one can get the material both ways.

woman with a six pack, [we decided] you're going to see a close-up of a person feeling free and electrifying joy.' Buchanan's (2012) analysis of Zumba Fitness as a global business marked by postmodern pastiche is therefore not far off the mark:

Like some great Zeitgeist cocktail, it is a frothy blend of Latin culture, social networking, globalization, weight consciousness, a feminizing society, solo entrepreneurship, and the maker's movement. It is tempting to call Zumba the quintessential 21st-century business. Given that it traffics in health, joy, and community, that is a hopeful sign for the species.

As Buchanan's comment suggests, Beto works with the tenets of neoliberalism¹²⁸ and capitalism, directing Zumba towards human emotions yet also harnessing a joyful product, disseminated through digital and media culture.

Zumba Fitness has continued to capitalise on this sense of collective joy. In September 2014, Zumba Fitness launched its first multimedia campaign: 'Let it move you.' As a Zumba PR (2014) states, this phrase: 'draws out the passion that lives deep within everyone. It's a feeling that moves you not only in a physical sense, but also emotionally, telling you to break free and bust a move.' Furthermore, 180LA, an A-List advertisement agency, commissioned an ad to accompany the campaign, which featured various people in their workplaces, who began to have small uncontrollable movements and then broke into life through dance, to the soundtrack of Diplo's *Express Yourself* (*ibid*). Meanwhile, in May 2015, Zumba partnered with Royal Caribbean cruises to introduce the Zumba Cruise, which set sail between 25 and 30 January 2016 and is due to set sail again in April 2017. This shows how far Zumba's marketing strategy has gone: it is becoming a global force and expanding its own alternative empires, celebrating Latin culture and taking all people on board. At the helm is Beto, an embodiment of Dionysus, encouraging all to shimmy and enjoy their bodies, a

¹²⁸ As Guardiola-Rivera (2010: 6) asserts, neoliberalism refers to a set of ideas that emerged in Germany and the US from the 1970s, which placed: 'an emphasis on the potential expansion of the viewpoint of commercial exchanges to nearly every other sphere of society from motherhood and reproduction to international relations.' Neoliberalism is a self-determining concept that devalues the collective. It never gained support in Latin America, arguably because of Latin America's collective-oriented nature, derived from indigenous and African traditions.

global father with multitudes of followers. I will advance these thoughts now, through my experiences at the ZIN Academy and *Believe* after-party, held in London from 10-11 July 2015, and through my work as a Zumba fitness instructor, which I have been engaging in since July 2015. I will argue that the space Beto creates is that of a Dionysian rite: the liberation of the body and mind from their shackles, through collective movement. Yet, a tension exists between Zumba as a capitalist enterprise and the sense of collective joy it creates.

Meeting Dionysus: ZIN Academy and Believe
ZIN Academy, 10-11 July 2015

Early on Friday 10 July 2015, I made my way to the Excel Centre in the docklands of East London. Waiting for the next DLR at Canning Town, I spied other Zumba enthusiasts on the platform. Their presence was unmistakable, with their bright patterned leggings, neon tops, and Zumba wear sneakers. I chuckled to myself as I thought of how we must have appeared to businessmen on their way to the office. We arrived at Excel and were greeted with a queue of Zumba enthusiasts, each Zumba outfit brighter than the last. Some fanatics practiced dance moves; others enthused about Beto. These were hardcore devotees. Even though I had lived and loved Zumba for over three years, I had not realised what a cult following Beto had. In fact, I realised I knew very little about him.

We were each given an armband, which allowed us entry into the auditorium, a large space, with a Zumba wear stall on the left-hand side and a huge raised stage in the centre. Die-hard Beto fans immediately rushed to the front to claim their space. I stayed a little back and waited. From the very moment Beto came on stage, accompanied by his ZESs (Zumba Education Specialists), he captivated the huge audience of mainly female Zumba instructors. As we went through the 1.5 hour masterclass, I had the distinctive feeling that this was joy being bottled and passed on to the masses. I was reminded of Nietzsche's (1923 [1872]: 70) description of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*: 'a visionary figure, born as it were of their own ecstasy.' The women around me squealed with delight, as Beto rolled up his sweat-stained vest to reveal a rippling six-pack. I could not

quite muster the same enthusiasm. After all, I don't like worshipping one God! Something struck me about Beto. He is all muscles, all brawn. This created conflicting feelings within me. I was left wondering was Beto just a patriarchal figure, encouraging women to be sexy and men to be hyper-muscular, whilst creaming off millions of dollars every year in this enterprise. I was reminded of this in one of his pep talks, when he described how he mainly hired 'normal' girls for modelling Zumba wear, and only sometimes 'beautiful' girls featured. I can remember my heart sinking when he said this. Yet, I cannot help but feel that the joy Zumba gives to many people through its global empire transcends its limitations. After all, Beto's overall motto is that 'Zumba is for all.' In the pep talk, Beto encouraged us to 'leave your egos behind... Spread the love, not the poison.' This resurfaced again in his discussion of ZES groups in different countries: the ZESs in Mexico are all in competition for 'who is closer to Beto,' while ZESs in the Philippines work together in harmony. Beto was clearly aware of his God-like status. Yet, he was also rather humble.

Following the masterclass and pep talk, a Zumba business representative took to the stage, showing us graphs of Zumba's continuing popularity and the range of various other courses available to extend our Zumba training. This had clearly been choreographed. The UK ZESs then took over, dividing us instructors into two lines. We would walk between one side of the room and the other in response to various questions. These included: 'Have you ever talked about another instructor behind their back?' The aim was to keep us humble, as they encouraged us not to be dismissive of other teacher's skills. I felt a little nauseous at this cheesy sentimentality. In the afternoon, we had a solo merengue and salsa mash-up session with Wally Diaz, one of Beto's old friends. Beto ducked backstage, awaiting his adoring fans, who queued for photos at every nearest opportunity. I did not have such a desire and did not even stay until the end of the day: the neon glare of the Zumba wear and the cult following of Beto were becoming too much.

After the second day of the academy, I prepared myself for the '*Believe*' after-party, held at the East London nightclub, Troxy. *Believe* is run by Maloca, a

dance school, café and wellbeing centre that celebrates Latin culture, based in Putney, Southwest London. Kabir (2015b: 2) appropriately describes Maloca as ‘a pan-Caribbean space’ in the heart of London, demonstrating roots and migrations of Caribbean cultures. Maloca is a microcosm of the Zumba enterprise, marketing Latin culture proudly whilst celebrating a lifestyle brand. Interestingly, one of the Colombian owners, Catalina Vitolo, has a personal connection with Beto, having gone to dance lessons with him as a child (*ibid*). Having provided some context, I will now describe my experiences of *Believe*.

Believe, 11 July 2015

Neon lights were flashing. And then it all kicked off. Groups of Zumba performers, UK and other European ZESs, as well as international artists such as Francesca Maria performed, leading routines amongst adoring fans. A few hours in, Beto made his appearance. He strode out on stage wearing white jeans and a white t-shirt, very similar to Kabir’s (2015b: 2-3) description of *Believe* in the previous year, except he wore black then. There were screams of joy, especially from adoring fans who had not been at the academy. Yet, something about Beto seemed lacklustre. Of course he must have been tired after two long days and probably would be jetting off somewhere else the next day. Many dismayed faces were hoping for more.

Afterwards, he took the microphone, as the glowing performers stood behind him, sweat dripping from their brows. What he said next was not entirely expected: ‘This was great fun. It was a performance. But please remember that Zumba is about education. We can have fun, but please remember the people in the class that you teach.’ The changing faces of the ‘performers’ behind him said it all: perspiration does not always mean that you will get praise. Afterwards, Beto went to the side of the stage, where he knew his adoring fans would be waiting for a photo opportunity. I reluctantly decided to go with the masses this time. Beto was cordial and smiled, a towel around his neck. Yet, I could sense what he was thinking: ‘Next customer.’ Indeed, Beto is the Dionysus of the twenty-first century, his vision born of the same system and ideology that has forged asexuality as its nemesis: capitalism. I respect what Beto has done. He

has liberated bodies worldwide and shared his culture in a positive light. Beto believes in education and that we become better teachers to inspire our students. But there is also a time and a place to say this.

The party petered out very soon after Beto's exit. The collective joy went limp. I made my way for the Venezuelan corn wrap stand outside. Beto passed on the way out. He clearly did not want to mingle with the masses. People were leaving thick and fast, the neon glare burning itself out. And I was left asking myself a burning question: is Zumba really collective joy or is it just another source of well-marketed capitalist kitsch? Inevitably this question still plagues me, especially having read Braidotti's (2006: 3) words, which describe the 'double pull in contemporary cultures as a conflict between, on the one hand, the rising demands for subjective singularities, or autonomy and, on the other hand, the conservative re-territorialization of desires for the purpose of commercial profit.' Undoubtedly, Zumba is a business. Yet, I firmly believe that the sense of collective joy it bottles is something special, and dare I say it, worth paying for. I will now examine how Zumba achieves this, by analysing Zumba as: (i) an asexual space, (ii) a celebration of the autoerotic body and (iii) an invocation of West African collective danced rites, as contextualised through my own teaching experiences and some more specific examples from the ZIN Academy. I wish to highlight both the good and bad aspects of Zumba: its harnessing of collective joy but also accusations that could be levelled against it, especially the cultural appropriation of the African body.

Zumba as a central example of Zorbitality

(i) Zumba as an asexual space

An interesting connection exists between the emergence of asexuality as a sexual orientation category implying a 'lack' of sexual attraction (Bogaert 2004: 279) and Zumba as a form of individual bodily pleasure in the early twenty-first century. In my opinion, both asexuality and Zumba subverted neoliberal ties. Firstly, the emergence of asexuality as a sexual orientation category decoupled sex and romance, and included the possibility of autoeroticism within its

formulation.¹²⁹ With particular reference to women who identified as asexual, a challenge to postfeminism was levelled and an alternative subjectivity offered beyond stereotypes of frigidity and radical feminism. Similarly, Zumba packaged an empowered enjoyment of one's own body, offering women in particular a safe space to play with various articulations of sexuality under a liberating label. Zumba cultivated a community on local and global scales, similar to the growth of the worldwide asexual community and local asexual networks via AVEN.

I came to asexuality in September 2012, after six months of attending Zumba classes and I wonder now if there is a connection between these two discoveries. Through the label of 'asexuality' I felt empowered, as I now had a descriptor that encapsulated my suspicion of the dyad and my love of many people. Equally, through Zumba, I grew to love the unexpected feeling of exhilaration I gained through moving to this infectious music, in synchrony with others, whilst discovering my incredible energy and rapidly improving coordination. Of course, I did not think of the context for the movements I was replicating in Zumba. Yet, two processes have led me to look deeper into this: (i) learning Spanish and (ii) studying the component dances of Zumba in relation to the Western colonisation of the 'New' World. Moreover, training as a Zumba instructor in March 2015 and beginning to teach classes in July 2015 has led me to realise that Zumba cannot be separated from my conception of (a)sexuality. In October 2015, I decided to abandon the label of 'asexuality' entirely, since I began to see that collective ecstasy was the basis of my libidinal life, and equally that sexual orientation categories are themselves products of patriarchy and capitalism. Yet, in the process I have realised the provocative nature of some Zumba songs and their corresponding movements.

In *El Serrucho* (The Handsaw), a cumbia song that I teach, Mr. Black (*El Presidente*) asserts that he is a 'carpenter,' who can mould and manipulate a

¹²⁹ Previously, asexuality and autoeroticism were considered separate categories (Johnson 1977). In Johnson's synthesis, asexual women were those who did not want to engage in partnered sexual relationships or masturbation. Autoerotic women did not want to engage in partnered sex but masturbated.

woman and that ultimately he will ‘nail’ (i.e. – fuck) her. The main section of this song features an arm movement that resembles a sawing motion, with an added twisting of the hips. On the words pertaining to ‘nail her,’ I get the class to do pelvic thrusts. These movements haunt me when I consider the misogynist nature of the sawing reference.¹³⁰ Admittedly, the choreography I use for this song mostly comes from a Zumba DVD, so it is a replicated misogyny. I often notice some Spanish girls laughing, as they know the meaning and how the movements relate. They also know that I know what the meaning is and we often exchange smiling glances through the mirror. A simplistic reading of this choreography could pass it off as an example of postfeminist pastiche, and thus as an expression of a neoliberal bodily economy. Yet, I view it rather as parody. As Jameson (1983 [1982]: 114) explains: ‘pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its humor.’ I argue that Zumba’s ‘parodic repetition’ (Butler 1990: 192) of sexualised motifs exposes ‘the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction’ (*ibid*). Zumba marks our death to any notions of identity, whilst harnessing a powerful collective spirit. Thus, to view Zumba as a postfeminist pastiche is painfully reductive, as I will argue now in my discussion of Zumba as a celebration of the autoerotic body.

(ii) Zumba as a celebration of the autoerotic body

At the ZIN academy, one type of body was not idealised. The message was ‘enjoy your body *for yourself*.’ Indeed, I felt like this experience was a ritual Zumba orgy, with no object of desire other than the *joy of desiring bodies*. I think about my own autoerotic practices, which interestingly I came to following a transformational encounter in Puerto Rico in November 2014,¹³¹ and soon after I trained as a Zumba teacher in March 2015. Now I can understand why Zumba appeals to me. Within a neoliberal economy, my body is not for my own consumption; it is to be consumed by another. This begs the question: What about my body’s pleasure *for itself*? Zumba is a safe space to engage with my body’s enjoyment, not under the watchful gaze of white

¹³⁰ Within African dance, such thrusts are not seen as sexual. Yet, this is far removed from the music video for the song, which is highly misogynist. Mr. Black sings, while a number of women, scantily clad, shimmy and dance lasciviously (see Mr. Black El Presidente 2013).

¹³¹ See autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (pp. 154-162).

heterosexual male privilege. Undoubtedly, Zumba empowers *some* women to feel 'sexy' and some would see this as playing into a postfeminist pastiche. Yet, in my view, Zumba reverses both the implications of classificatory language and the patriarchal gaze by offering a post-verbal alternative. Thus, my response to the question: 'How can you *be* asexual and enjoy Zumba?' becomes a resonant: 'This is the truth of *my* body's autoerotic pleasure,' and still further a post-verbal break into a Beto shuffle or a merengue march.¹³² My experiences resonate with Kabir's (2013: 147) comment that new configurations of Afro-Caribbean dance forms can develop 'new modes of conceptualizing the relationship between desire, pleasure, and empowerment.' Zumba is arguably a safe container for women to explore their sexualities away from the sexual dynamics of the dance floor, for it is often said that Latin couple dances are dances of seduction (Aparicio 1998).¹³³ Because of my relational style I do not find it comfortable, safe or pleasurable to dance with one person alone, especially a person of the opposite sex. Indeed, in Zumba, the couple dancing aspect of many of the dancing styles has been removed and in a postmodern turn one dances for oneself.¹³⁴ I will explore this more in the next section, which will examine the fusion of European and African dance forms in the colonial encounter.

(iii) *Zumba as an invocation of West African collective danced rites*

An invocation of the African body has been inherent within Zumba since its inception, with Beto mentioning his 'ugly white skin' (quoted in Kabir 2015a: 1) and declaring that 'I want to be like them [Africans/Afro-Latinos/Afro-Colombians] – they have the flavour in their bodies' (*ibid*: 6). Undoubtedly, Beto's words fetishise the African body, thus highlighting Zumba's role in cultural appropriation. Yet, as Gilroy (1995: 29) asserts, there is no such thing

¹³² This response is echoed in my reconfiguration of Katherine's Latin dance floor scene through queer dance floor practices in section 5.2 (see pp. 196-197).

¹³³ This will be explored further in autobiographical passage 7 (pp. 167-169).

¹³⁴ This trend of dancing for oneself is not new, in Western or Latin dance. Ehrenreich (2007) reminds us that during the rock and roll era, people began dancing in groups rather than in couples. Equally, in genres such as the Cuban timba, which developed in the late twentieth century, couples dance closely but do not touch. In 1982, the Cuban group, *Los Van Van*, launched an innovative rhythm called *conga-son*, a slow and measured style where people danced separately, as in *El Baile Del Buey Cansao* (The dance of the tired ox).

as a univocal African body, since the Black Atlantic exists 'in a webbed network, between the local and global,' internally divided by other factors such as sexuality, age, economics and ethnicity.

As Bartky (1990: 22-32) notes, colonialist regimes forge three types of oppression: stereotyping, cultural domination and sexual objectification. These processes overlap, resulting in a fragmentation where the objectified person becomes identified with their body. Beto could be accused of these features, both through his own words, and through his spreading of Afro-diasporic rhythms globally, where many Zumba instructors probably are not aware of the genealogy of the dances they utilise. As hooks (1992: 21) asserts, it is vital to take stock of the Other's history, in order to create a more ethical relation, for the biggest danger is 'the commodification of Otherness,' where we seek to enable transformation through racialised sexual encounters. Indeed, Beto's words have sexual connotations, which emphasise the presumed sexual pleasure of the African body. Thus, he plays into hooks's (*ibid*: 22) fears that 'sexuality is the metaphoric Other that threatens to take over, consume, transform *via* the experience of pleasure.' Yet, as hooks (*ibid*) quips, desire for the other and a longing for pleasure 'is an unrealized political possibility,' which Zumba arguably taps into through its harnessing of a capitalist enterprise to create collective joy, and its celebration of a Pan-African identity, which Appiah (2001 [1992]) also asserts as a plane of possibility.

What I feel Zumba *does* achieve is a deconstruction of the seeming naturalness of coupledness in Latin social dance. Zumba instead invokes two collective ecstatic traditions that were devalued by Western domination: West African solo dance within collectives, and Dionysian rites in the Western tradition (see Ehrenreich 2007).¹³⁵ Many West African dances were danced in a circle and it was only when they became influenced by European courtly couple dance that Latin couple dance emerged.¹³⁶ Whilst these dances today function 'as a means

¹³⁵ See section 3.3 (pp. 114-119) for more on the connection between the suppression of West African danced rites and the legacy of Dionysus.

¹³⁶ For more on this, see Farris Thompson (2006).

for the interracial appreciation and enjoyment of the black body, both male and female, where kinetic motion to syncopated percussive rhythms, and the concomitant generation of pleasure, becomes the channel for collective subversion' (Kabir 2013: 143), I question the naturalisation of the dyad. Zumba removes the couple hold and allows increasing freedom throughout the whole body. Although Zumba is danced mainly in lines, circling movements are often incorporated. For instance, in some of my routines I choreograph movements to the front and then get the participants to spin around in a circle, or to replicate the movements on each side. One could say that this is an adapted version of the circularity of African dance, thus subverting the linear tenets of capitalism.¹³⁷ In essence, Zumba does *not* celebrate the African body, but rather it evokes its sense of collective ecstasy, as well as the *memory* of an uncreolised African body. Thus it marks a full Zorbital process. The wounds of Western colonial history may be turned to inner ecstasy through imagining alternative dancing configurations, which enable collective ecstasy and the internalisation of a vital collective spirit as a resistant imaginary. This is the transformative power of the Zumba experience. As a fellow Zumba lover, Vida Thorington, aptly states in Buchanan's (2012) article: 'Society tells you to walk inside the lines, but not here. There aren't any lines in Zumba. There isn't any right or wrong way. Zumba is where you get to be yourself... It opens your spirit.'

3.5 - Concluding remarks

The analysis of alternative genealogies in this chapter has pointed to other ways of understanding asexuality in terms of Zorbitality, framed by the threefold Zorbital process from vulnerability to inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. I have sought to show how the linear models of female (a)sexualities proposed by empirical psychological and cultural accounts (see chapter 2) can be challenged through a resistant imaginary. As demonstrated in the examples from literature (section 3.1), the ecstatic movement of futuristic utopias can enable social transformation, and the articulation of a feminine libidinal

¹³⁷ As Kabir (2014) succinctly argues, African rhythms may potentially be used as a bulwark against capitalism.

economy, which supports the wellbeing of *all* humans. This differed somewhat to the history of dance (section 3.2), where the image of the girl ‘dancing herself to death’ was dominant in the cultural imaginary. Yet, I challenged this by drawing on the work of the twentieth-century dancer, Katherine Dunham, who developed her alternative lineage through Afro-diasporic rhythms. Finally, I looked to the collective ecstasy of Dionysus and its suppression through colonial history and the rise of Western capitalist cultures (section 3.3). Yet, I drew on the example of Zumba to show how this collective joy may be accessed again (section 3.4). Finally, this chapter introduced my second methodology, me-search (Nguyen 2015), which acknowledges the intricate relationship between my experiences and my research. I will carry this method into chapter 4, where I will narrate my personal journey of becoming with regards to (a)sexualities. Onwards this dance shall go.

Part II: Me-search

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw on me-search, a methodology that shows how ‘personal experiences and histories can become frames of analysis that are valuable to intellectual and academic work’ (Nguyen 2015: 470). I seek to highlight how I came to asexuality, and how my subjectivity transformed through scenes of ecstatic movement *and* the research process. My account serves to disrupt the flow of the previous genealogy (chapters 2 and 3) and act as a connecting point with my respondents’ accounts in chapters 5 and 6. This chapter provides a micro-genealogy of the threefold Zorbital process, via vulnerability, inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. These explorations foreground Zorbitality as a resistant imaginary, which appeals to Braidotti’s (2006: 33) sustainable nomadic ethics, characterised by an enhanced sense of the collective.

By drawing on me-search, I firstly seek to critique the academy’s disembodied approach to scholarship. Weaving autobiographical/poetic writing and critical self-reflexivity, I aim to dance around the stasis of academic prose and to enable the emergence of a ‘migratory’ identity (Spry 2001: 706). This aim is captured in Spry’s (*ibid*: 708) words: ‘I have learned that heresy is greatly misaligned and, when put to good use, can begin a robust dance of agency in one’s personal/political/professional life.’ Secondly, me-search offers considerable scope for viewing women’s embodied narratives of (a)sexualities through transformative movement. This speaks to Cixous’s (1976 [1975]: 880) assertion that: ‘She must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history...’ Furthermore, drawing on Cixous and Clément’s (1986) concept of the feminine libidinal economy, this me-search seeks to highlight the creative potential of the moving female body in thwarting the death drive of patriarchal structures. Finally, I seek to address Johnson’s (1977) warning that the lived realities of asexual and autoerotic women are at danger of being lost in narratives of frigidity and chasteness. Referencing Ahmed’s (2006) queer

phenomenology, where sexuality is viewed as the lived body's relationship with time and space, this me-search seeks to reconceptualise asexuality as a reoriented queer sensibility, with realigned erotic poles from autoeroticism to polyamory. In the process, it seeks to challenge the fixity of identity categories and highlight their inadequacy in narrating the complexities of lived realities.

Chapter 4: Dancing to sustainable futures: Zorbitality as process

4.1 - Exegesis for creative work

Every time she makes “sense” of something, she has to “cross over,” kicking a hole out of the old boundaries of the self and slipping under or over, dragging the old skin along, stumbling over it. It hampers her movement in the new territory, dragging the ghost of the past with her. It is a dry birth, a breech birth, a screaming birth, one that fights her every inch of the way. It is only when she is on the other side and the shell cracks open and the lid from her eyes lifts that she sees things in a different perspective. It is only then that she makes connections, formulates the insights... Suddenly the repressed energy rises, makes decisions, connects with conscious energy and a new life begins (Anzaldúa 1999: 71)

Anzaldúa here evokes Coatlicue, an Aztec serpent goddess who represents a nomadic female subjectivity, crosses borders and gains new life in the process. Coatlicue is able to sustain changes and owns her own desires. There is power in her moving body. She is not bound to one cultural tradition but is instead open to migration. This sense of movement is reflected in my own journey of becoming with regards to (a)sexualities, which I will now briefly narrate.¹³⁸

In September 2012 I discovered ‘asexuality.’ Truthfully, I first heard the word ‘asexual’ as a voice in my head. Initially, it whispered softly but then it became louder. I did not know what it meant but as I read more, I felt a sense of relief. Undoubtedly, my identification was a cumulative process. Yet it seemed to come to me in a moment of divine inspiration. Through this label I felt somehow empowered, although I was acutely aware that it did not fully capture my lived reality, notably my immense energy, strength and self-containment. I often questioned why I had to identify as anything at all. Yet, I realise now that I adopted this label largely as a reaction against others’ assumptions that I was heterosexual, monogamous and wanted children.

In March 2014, I experienced a shift in my subjectivity, from asexuality to autoeroticism, resulting from a specific encounter in Puerto Rico.¹³⁹ I see

¹³⁸ I realise that I mentioned some markers of my journey in section 3.4. However, as part of this Zorbital structure of this thesis, I follow the genealogy back further in this section.

¹³⁹ See autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (pp. 154-162).

autoeroticism as a source of my bodily autonomy. By October 2015, I decided to abandon labels entirely, as I realised that they are products of patriarchy and capitalism. In the process, I began to explore the possibilities of non-sexual polyamory, and in June 2016 even began some partnered sexual exploration.¹⁴⁰ One may ask whether that makes me 'asexual' any more. I would reply that labels do not define me. Movement and transformation do.

Yet, origins must be acknowledged before being performed anew. I grew up in a patriarchal household, where my Dad often made comments about my mother's appearance and where my mother in turn objectified my body. My Dad is staunchly Catholic and for a long time I was brainwashed by this dictatorship, which I thankfully disavowed at the age of 19. I have consciously chosen to distance myself from the Catholic Church's thinking and in particular its continual oppression of women. I recognise now the deep somatophobia¹⁴¹ that the Catholic Church instilled in me and am glad I have entirely removed myself from the toxicity of this environment.

I see my body as a miracle, since it looks nothing like in its past life. Yet, it bears the wounds of its painful voyages. I was overweight as a child, lost a quarter of my body weight at the age of 11, kept the weight off and only gradually regained it as I relinquished patriarchy's controlling gaze. A sense of discomfort within the male gaze pervaded my teenage years, a concern that still resonates today.¹⁴² I was deeply depressed, yet was often accused of being quiet. In fact, if I could have mustered up the courage to speak the words that I felt, people would have been shocked at their violence. The only way I could cope was through playing Classical music, which allowed me to gain expression beyond my silenced voices. Yet, when I had to perform, my body felt like a static instrument.

¹⁴⁰ I will explore this in section 7.3 (pp. 273-277).

¹⁴¹ This refers to fear and hatred of the body. See Grosz (1994) for a feminist reading of this concept.

¹⁴² See autobiographical passage 3 (pp. 151-154).

During a period of deep depression, aged 19, after the first year of my Classical music degree, I regained a lot of weight. This caused me to repeat the process of weight loss followed by gradual weight increase.¹⁴³ In the aftermath of my weight losses, the threat of putting on weight and seeing its physical manifestation made me feel completely out of control. Equally, I was continually compared to a beautiful sister, which made me feel even more inadequate. Yet, things began to change when I discovered Zumba in March 2012, only six months after my discovery of asexuality. This began an alternative voyage, where I regained ownership of my body. I developed muscle and strength, and stopped weighing myself. I no longer paid lip service to patriarchy. My body decided what was best for it, even if initially my mind had encouraged it to fit in a patriarchal 'Bell jar,' to draw on the title of Plath's (1966 [1963]) novel. My body, quite frankly, has a mind of its own. Thus, when I trained as a Zumba instructor in March 2015 and began teaching classes in July 2015, I experienced a sustainable transformation. Zumba has been a lifeline for me. This is why movement and dance are so central to the flow of my narrative.

My work seeks to capture embodied moments when identities are in flux, and the sense of becoming these offer. I draw on nine autobiographical passages from four diaries, written between September 2013 and July 2016. Some of these take the form of written memories, and others have a more performative air, like the scenes of a play. I chose these excerpts because they evoke the threefold Zorbital process and highlight how a resistant imaginary emerges from the internalisation of a collective spirit. Throughout, I utilise the third person, as a protective strategy for dealing with painful past emotions, which Haug (1987) similarly endorsed in her initial memory work.¹⁴⁴ This approach enabled me to look at my past self in a more compassionate light.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ See autobiographical passage 2 (pp. 144-150).

¹⁴⁴ The exception is autobiographical passage 9 (pp. 174-177). I wish to orientate this memory in the present, so I use 'I.'

¹⁴⁵ See p. 34 of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of the use of third person in collective biography work.

As part of this me-search, I also reflected on previous diaries and journals but decided not to include these reflections. Rereading my diaries was a useful personal exercise, which enabled me to reach a deeper engagement with my past. However, the richer data emerged from specific memories related to dance and personal transformation, which I had written about in more recent times. Perhaps this was because my diaries felt like historical documents I could not really re-write in terms of resistant movement. By allowing myself to remember and rewrite *within* the research process, I engaged in acts of compassion and renewal. Furthermore, by applying my imagination to the process of remembering, I *enabled* my personal transformation.

In this me-search, I seek to explore Zorbitality as a resistant imaginary, by highlighting the threefold Zorbital process: (i) vulnerability, (ii) inner ecstasy and (iii) collective ecstatic motion. Firstly, Zorbitality emerges from a primary vulnerability, which is a by-product of heteronormative structures and embodies a feeling of stasis (autobiographical passage 1, pp. 143-144). This vulnerability creates rigid ways of moving and dancing (autobiographical passage 2, pp. 144-150). Furthermore, vulnerability led me to an asexual identity (autobiographical passage 3, pp. 151-154). It was not until later that I realised that 'asexuality' as a categorical identification impeded my transformation. Secondly, vulnerability was turned to inner ecstasy during and after an encounter in the Caribbean, where my subjectivity danced (see autobiographical passages 4 and 5, pp. 154-162). This enabled a shift in my libidinal life, and enacted a period of questioning.

Finally, Zorbitality turns vulnerability to strength not only in thought, but more specifically in the realm of collective ecstatic motion. As my memory related to dancing on a table with my Zumba friends in a Latin club shows, there is power in the collective, even if the politics of heteronormative spaces do not entirely enable Zorbitality (see autobiographical passage 6, pp. 164-167). As my memory related to tango classes (see passage 7, pp. 167-169) shows, couple dance has certain power dynamics, which can be inhibiting for women. This jars with my experience of Zumba, which celebrates bodies moving for

themselves within a collective. Indeed, seeing coupledness as the *natural* basis of Latin social dance also devalues other genealogies, notably West African collective danced rites.

Autobiographical passage 8 (pp. 170-171) highlights the power of ecstatic movement in overcoming the dualisms that confine us, and shows how ecstatic movement *itself* turns vulnerability to strength. This is echoed in my brief account of the significance of Zumba in my personal trajectory (see pp. 172-173). By autobiographical passage 9 (pp. 174-177), which took place in Cuba in May 2016, it will become clear that Zorbitality can be perceived as a resistant imaginary, which enables one to transcend vulnerability through the internalisation of a collective spirit.

It is perhaps fitting that my first major shift towards 'Zorbitality' occurred in Puerto Rico and that I experienced Zorbitality's role as a resistant imaginary in Cuba, facing the very mountains that gave birth to *son*, a genre that influenced the subsequent development of many Latin dance genres. Thus, in this account I wish to highlight the Caribbean as a site of performative repetition (see Benítez-Rojo 1996), that enables personal and historic transformations. I will now turn to the first Zorbital process – vulnerability.

4.2 - Vulnerability: The wound of possibility

Autobiographical passage 1:

My earliest dance memory – 23/09/2015, diary 4, p. 10.

She was at playschool, aged 4, perhaps. It was a day when parents had been invited in. They were all sitting in chairs. The teacher decided to put on some music so the children could get up and dance. One by one, little children's toes came to life. Eventually, all the children were up, spinning in circles and laughing. All except for her... She sat in a corner with her mother, who coaxed her to get up and move. But she would not budge. She cannot remember exactly how she felt at the time but she can only suspect that she felt paralysed and mute, as she often would in later years, when faced with similar situations.

This was my earliest memory related to dance. As can be seen, my origins were in stillness. From a very young age, I can remember feeling incredibly uncomfortable within my own body. As a child, I was overweight. I spent a lot of time on my own and felt like a misfit in the world. I also thought that I was never good enough in the eyes of my mother. In this memory, she coaxed me to move, but I felt no compulsion to. I ask myself now if this was an act of agency. After all, why should one move if one does not feel moved to? This question will be central to my analysis of the following passages. In the next memory, from many years later, I will further explore the theme of stasis and its relationship with vulnerability.

Autobiographical Passage 2:

'I've got life' (!) - 23/09/2015, diary 4, pp. 23-27.

Summer 2007. She had just finished a year of studying Music at University and was feeling bereft. The personal utopia she had built up since childhood – Classical Music as salvation – came crashing down around her. It had gradually dawned on her that all those hours of 'practice' had been a veneer for hard work. During that first year, she struggled with her emotions. There was an intense perfectionism – working from first thing in the morning to late at night, competing with her flatmate, who was in her year on the same course. She put on almost a stone in weight...

That summer she moved back home again. She hated herself. She hated everything she had built up around herself. She wanted to study so many other things. She looked up other courses obsessively, thinking she might switch to them. And ultimately she decided, as she had decided all those years ago, that there was something she could take control of: her weight, her body.¹⁴⁶ She could shape its contours. This time however, the aim was mish-mashed with the pervasive thought of her flatmate's anorexia and also her reading of books about Auschwitz in preparation for her visit there that summer. Primo Levi's *If This Is A Man* (2003 [1947]) was one of her main reads. Something reverberated with her past body, whose feelings and motivations she could not unearth (although she longed to). Anorexia and the forced starvation of concentration camps also cast their deathly glow.

She embarked on a mission of control. Each day there was the same reveille. Get up at eight. Eat an apple and an orange. Drink a glass of

¹⁴⁶ I was almost 20 years old when this memory took place. It was my second voyage into conscious weight-loss. My first had been at the age of 10/11.

water. Do 20 minutes of skipping. When Dad had gone to Mass, put on that one song that she played again and again – Nina Simone's *I Got Life*; to which she developed her own little dance routine, which she repeated over and over again, with no variations. It was like a record on a loop, a girl dancing to a song about life, yet in reality almost dancing herself to death. Her movements were dead. Her mission was set in stone. She would time the music to stop for her Dad's arrival home 30 minutes later.

She would go for a quick walk before lunch, then would come back to eat a bowl of vegetable soup, one slice of brown bread with a thin spread of butter and some sardines or lean meat. One cup of tea.

Afternoon. More skipping. Reading about the camps. Her Dad would go for a walk. She would dance to the same song over and over for an hour. Read more about the camps. Always looking out the same window. The same grandfather clock chiming. The same copy of that grey Lowry painting hanging on the wall. All static. Nothing moving. More reading about the camps. She would wait for dinner.

Dinner. Strict. It could be no more than 800 calories. Watching some TV with her Mum. Dad gone out for a walk. Mum still watching TV but she can get away with dancing in the other room. 'Do not disturb me,' she tells her mother. That same song. That same routine. Some ginger fizz and cordial as a treat. More looking up courses. More TV. 'Why doesn't she get a job,' her Dad asks her Mum.

About six weeks later, the weight is all off, with interest. Superficially she feels better. Her life has the general feeling of: 'I can do what I want. I don't have to do anything anyone tells me anymore.'

She went to Auschwitz with her Dad. She felt like she hadn't left there all her life.

Almost time to move back to University. She can't remember what happened to her diet then. She knows she still danced to that same song daily. Same routine. That daily reveille. Traumatized by the camp. Traumatized by her history. Traumatized that she could conflate her history with those who survived the camp. How morbid her life had become, as she controlled her body under a patriarchal gaze.

'I got life.' More like 'I've got death.' '*Arbeit macht frei*' – that deathly reveille.

But at least when she had played at that orchestra concert a friend of her Dad's had said to him: 'Is your daughter that thin girl there?' 'Yes,' he had said.

On the car journey home he told her so. On the same journey, she asked her Mum if she looked better now: 'Yes, you do,' she said, although you never looked bad.'

The car engine churned on, the only sign of life. All was static. All was quiet. The thoughts darted in her head. She continued her death dance until the very end.

*

The memory I have just narrated brings tears to my eyes. Aged 19, I dance alone in my family home, at the service of patriarchy. In *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993 [1987]: 188), Irigaray describes patriarchy as 'a society of intermale bonding, which respects only the genealogy of the sons and the fathers and the competition between brothers.' In the process, women's genealogies are subordinated to men's. This was evident in my dance. There was no joy in it. I felt dead and sacrificed to an internalised patriarchy, like the Chosen One of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. It is notable that I use the word 'utopia' to describe the world that I had built up around me. Thomas More (1905 [1516]) first coined the term to describe an imaginary community with desirable qualities. Yet, in my memory, utopia began to verge on dystopia. Although my world was built on the 'high' art of Classical music, it was in reality a fictional world of dead men. On the one hand, I romanticised it as my saviour from depression. Yet, as this memory demonstrates, Music was just part of the armoury of identities I put forward to try and appear as if I was in control and had maintained full mastery. Like any dictatorship, political or personal, what lay beneath was far from rosy. I grasped at the only thing I knew I could control: 'her weight, her body. She could shape its contours.'

My anorexic flatmate and the suffering of concentration camps, which Mbembe (2003: 12) describes as 'the absolute power of the negative,' act as spectres in this passage.¹⁴⁷ Like the patriotic music concentration camp prisoners were forced to listen to, I repeatedly played a song about life, moving to it with the motions of an automaton.¹⁴⁸ In fact, at this time I had become obsessed with the

¹⁴⁷ Mbembe draws on this description in relation to Arendt's (1966 [1951]: 444) musings in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

¹⁴⁸ This automaton will be evoked in my respondents' accounts in section 5.1 (see pp. 186-191).

Holocaust and the plight of existence. I was on the side of death, especially as I visited Auschwitz with my father that Summer. Whilst my experiences should in no way be conflated with the mass suffering of Auschwitz inmates, in my head everything had got mixed up, reflected in my words: 'She felt like she hadn't left there all her life.' This seems to reflect Agamben's (1998 [1995]) concept of 'bare life,' which suggests that the concentration camp is the underlying nexus of modern political life, created through a particular spatial arrangement that exists outside of normal law. Within this space, individual bodies experience 'life exposed to death' (*ibid*: 88). In a similar way, my visit to Auschwitz compounded my feelings of being imprisoned within an inhibited body that desired to move of its own accord, not for anyone else. Yet, I felt completely trapped by my history.

The childhood home is central to my memory. As Reavey (2010) poignantly writes in her work on agency in memories of child sexual abuse, spaces are central to how we remember: '... material locations (spaces) are not simply peripheral to acts of remembering but central to how the ongoing flow of memory and agency is constituted and experienced by individuals in their practice of memorial self-interpretation' (*ibid*: 314). In this way, agency becomes 'diverse and multiple' (*ibid*) and influenced by the social and political structures of society. Whilst my memory does not speak of sexual abuse, the trauma my experiences induced was more intangible. I could not put my finger on what exactly I was experiencing and grieving. I still cannot. Yet, what my memory does have in common with those Reavey examines is the narrative of the female sacrificial victim and male aggressor (see Haaken 1999), as I have already invoked in my exploration of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (see pp. 104-107). I agree with Reavey that the agency of the woman in this victim/aggressor relationship is not purely about powerlessness. Rather, we need to offer 'an alternative focus for the reading of agency in memory, as well as disrupting a linear and individualized linking of past and present' (Reavey 2010: 314-315). Indeed, Reavey (*ibid*: 317) invokes the figure of Primo Levi, who I also referenced in my narrative, as a person who troubles a linear version of agency. Through simple everyday acts, Levi managed to survive Auschwitz.

Yet, he was aware of his conformity with the Nazi regime, and the sacrifice of his fellow inmates, a past that put an unbearable weight on his existence, causing him to commit suicide in 1987. Agency is thus a thoroughly ambivalent site.

Rethinking my reading of Levi's work at the time this memory took place, I realise now that I was also questioning whether I could really be called 'a legitimate victim' (Reavey 2010: 317), since I was never physically or sexually abused. Yet, the sense of distress I still feel in 2016 is massive, and emerges constantly in my therapy sessions. It strikes me that I was brought up to feel there was a 'safe' inside space, largely based around the bourgeois family home, which I inhabited unquestionably. This brings into focus the relationship between public and private space. Public space is seen as masculine and rational (Sparke 1996), while the private realm is seen as patriarchal and based on private ownership. Furthermore, as Latour (2005) attests, the family home is a space where secrets are hidden and boundaries exist in and between certain family members, reinforced by family rituals. Whenever I enter my family home now, I see ghosts I do not necessarily want to encounter. It is a static space, an asexual one, in a negative sense of the word. I cannot move freely here. Yet, I do not want to sever ties with my mother and father, both of whom I love dearly.

I found myself rethinking the dominance of my father as I read Ahmed's (2006) work on queer phenomenology. Ahmed's interpretation of the family as associated with the body of the father is a convincing one. In this configuration, '...to be "in line" is to direct one's desires toward marriage and reproduction; to direct one's desires toward the reproduction of the family line' (*ibid*: 74).

Perhaps a large part of my reluctance towards romantic relations with either sex is that romantic relations with men seem to conform to my Dad's occasional comments that start with 'and when you meet a nice man and get married...'. Furthermore, romantic relations with women feel like they have been barred to me and seem like a source of shame that I would have to hide from the family (i.e. - my father). My father was both emotionally distant and too closely attached to my siblings and me. He often invaded our spaces through his thoughts, actions and words. This is evidenced in my memory, as I stop the

music and my dancing in time for his arrival home. Another example of note was when my sister had begun seeing her first boyfriend, and stayed over at his flat. At the dinner table the next day, I can remember my Dad angrily saying to her: 'I hope nothing *immoral* was going on there.' Thinking back on this, I feel angry and invaded, even though he was not speaking to me. This spirit of invasion lingers on. Just recently, my father gave away all of my childhood teddies, which had particular emotional value for me, without even asking. Whilst undoubtedly this upset me, I had got so used to his overstepping of boundaries that I did not really react. Yet, the truth remains that I love my Dad perhaps more than anybody else in the world. I wrote letters to the tooth fairy every day until I was 12, long after I knew s/he was my Dad. Yet, this curious exchange enhanced our relationship. We have always had a special bond. He has had a difficult life, having encountered death many times, yet has always persevered. I know he also loves me very dearly.

Likewise, I cannot blame my mother, for her mother made her feel bodily shame. As Susie Orbach (2009) reminds us, female body hatred is a trans-generational process. If a mother has a poor relationship with her body, she will pass it down to her daughters. Yet, I argue that this is not the fault of mothers alone. It is a greater structural problem that resonates within our society. It starts with the male gaze, which is then internalised by women (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Equally, I extend Allegranti's (2011) criticism of Orbach's (2006) work, which asserts that Orbach's position too easily accepts that our early experiences fully fix our relationship with our bodies. As Allegranti (2011: 32) argues, both our brain's plasticity, and the *structural* subjective changes wrought by mutual recognition in the process of expressive movement, can be vital to this transformation. One can transform and overcome the limitations of a formerly despised body, as my own trajectory attests. Yet, in this particular memory I was still left with the dead weight of my mother's commentary. I asked her if I looked 'better' after I had lost the weight and she responded: 'Yes, you do... although you never looked bad.' I was testing her and she had failed.

Although this memory demonstrates a primary vulnerability, it could be read in terms of a stirring sense of agency. Although private space creates power dynamics that affect female autonomy, agency is also possible (Duncan 1996). By actively finding moments where I could move, I was beginning to challenge the stasis of my body. I realise that the intent behind my movement was not agentic. I was revealing ‘a capacity to act,’ yet had not quite reached ‘a felt *sense* of action’ (Reavey 2010: 315). Yet, this memory propelled me towards the boundaries I needed to seek between myself and the family home. While the deathly living room where I danced was central to the unfolding of myself in this memory, it also made me realise the need for gaining a safe space for collective enjoyment. Indeed, anytime I go home now, I practice my Zumba routines in the very same space, whilst imagining the collective spirit of multiple Zumba communities. Through my alternative practices, I create a new relationship with this space, which haunted me for so long. In this way, I highlight ‘space as an active contributor to the movement between past and present’ (*ibid*: 325).

In the final passage of this section, I will highlight a sense of vulnerability within public space. Significantly, this memory took place in London, in the years following my move from Ireland. I am grateful to London, as it has enabled me to become the person I have always wanted to be: confident, energetic and eternally moving. It has also allowed me to reflect on my identity. I discovered asexuality and Zumba, and reached what I term Zorbitality here. In the following passage, I highlight the role of vulnerability in coming to my asexual identity, which will be transcended through my subjective transformation in section 4.3 and the internalisation of a collective ecstatic spirit in section 4.4. Significantly, I introduce myself as the fictional character, ‘the girl in the navy blue dress,’ which references a dress that I have owned since the age of 17, and which I happened to be wearing during many transformative scenes. This image will be carried into section 4.3, thus showing how objects and belongings can create a thread that enables transformation.

Autobiographical passage 3:**The Postfeminist Blues: June 2012 - 26/09/2013, diary 1, pp. 23-25.**

[This scene took place approximately three months before the girl in the navy blue dress came to the label of 'asexuality']

A girl in a navy blue dress
 Stands poised and elegant.
 Her cheeks aglow
 Post Zumba exertions,
 Her body toned and tanned
 From the spell of good weather.

The dress's V-shaped backline nips in at the waist.
 Tied with a blue velvet ribbon
 Highlighting a chiselled form.
 The skirt's flowing fabric dips at the back.
 Her brown leather wedges add two inches.
 She stands tall.

As tall as her male friends she stands at the bar.
 She's on level footing now, her shoes add leverage.
 'How tall are you?', one of them asks.
 She tells the truth.
 The wedges add two inches
 Nothing more, nothing less.

To another bar they go.
 Greeted by the jeers she had feared.
 'Can I sleep with your woman,' *he* asks the male friends
 Who stand on not knowing what to say.
 The girl cannot speak.
 Shock blocks the words from escaping her throat.

'Can I just say you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen...
 In *this* bar,' he leers.
 She sits and rants.
 'The Ryanair of the man world,' she attests.
 One male friend takes pity.
 He goes to the leering stranger and says 'Apologise.'

'No,' he replies with beer on his breath and a cheeky grin on his face.
 'She should be flattered, so fuck off.'
 The girl sits in silence, shocked but spoken for.
 The prick eventually comes round.
 'I apologise,' he offers.
 'You should be flattered though.'

The girl loses the rag.
 'Don't you dare speak to another woman like that.
 I'm not a piece of meat, I'm not a tool.
 Don't you dare.'
 The male friends sit on in silence.
 'But he apologised, I suppose,' one of them tries.

The girl retreats to the toilets
 Standing tall,
 Strutting her stuff
 As if on a catwalk
 But for whom and for what?
 She's spoken for as she passes by in his gaze.

Closing time and they leave the bar.
 Male friends offer to walk her to her bus stop.
 'No, I'm walking home.'
 The words leave her lips before she can think.
 'Are you sure you'll be safe?'
 'Just leave me go'...
 She turns and walks away.

3am and the walk home doesn't clear her head.
 Her iPod on full blast, she hears a voice behind her
 A male voice
 'Marry me.'
 She quickens her pace, her navy blue dress flapping.
 Two inches taller but feeling small.

Alone in her room
 A young woman sits small
 Crying in the dark.
 Capable of speech
 Yet spoken for.
 She is speechless.
 And the tears flow.
 If only she could speak.
 She can speak...

*

This scene took place in July 2013, just over two months before I came to a categorical asexual identification. It is still very fresh in my mind, as it felt like a rite of passage. Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) first coined the term 'rites of passage' to denote significant life events, implying a transition from one stage to another and a shift in roles. Yet, his theories assume a linear life course and reduce asexuality to an immaturity narrative. He asserts that rites of passage

mark a 'separation from the asexual world,' which lead one 'into the world of sexuality (*ibid*: 67). An alternative vision needs to be developed, which recognises that rites of passage are lived in time and space, where transformation need not be in the realm of genital sexuality. As Kenworthy Teather (1999: 9) asserts, rites of passage are rather related to 'what one's body will permit (or what the individual chooses to permit) and the decisions and challenges one feels motivated to follow through.' Thus, rites of passage are not just imposed by social institutions, but are influenced by human agency within space. This perspective has particular relevance for the scene I have just narrated, since it shows how a rite of passage can actually enable a transition to asexuality as a dance of female agency.

In this scene, I felt like the sacrificial victim of Stravinsky's *Rite* or what I imagine the indigenous subject must have felt like on Columbus's arrival. I was enjoying an evening with some male friends. I was aware of the power dynamics that went with my role as a solo female within a male collective. Yet, my brown wedges enabled me to feel a certain sense of powerfulness: 'She's on level footing now, her shoes add leverage.' Yet, when faced with the misogyny of the lecherous oaf in the bar, who reduced me to an object of exchange, any feeling of power was stripped from me: 'Shock blocks the words from escaping her throat.' Whilst one of my male friends spoke up for me and asked the man to apologise, I ultimately felt spoken for. Even when the oaf came to apologise, I got little satisfaction.

Looking back on this scene now, what strikes me most about its violence is how the oaf suppressed my movement. I felt like a statue or a doll, as he asked my friends: 'Can I sleep with your woman?' My small acts of resistance came in getting up and 'strutting' my stuff, retreating to the bathroom. Furthermore, after the incident, I actively chose to walk home at 3am in the morning, thus going beyond the constraints being imposed on my body. 'Just leave me go...' These words are a powerful manifestation of what Austin (1962) describes as speech acts, where words can simultaneously perform actions. I was asking

both the perpetrator and my male friends to respect my need for ecstatic movement. Yet, as I cried, I wished the pain would go away.

This scene began a process, which would continue until two months after, when I went dancing with my friends in *Guanabara*, a Brazilian bar, to celebrate my 24th birthday. I was wearing a highly gendered turquoise and pink floral dress. I still felt like the doll from the night of the Postfeminist Blues. A friend of mine, a young man who I knew was in love with me, came and danced too. I loved him deeply but my heart was set in stone. Yet, something was transforming within me. That night was full of gazing men, situated within an imaginary Latin utopia. My heart should have been beating like the *conga* drums the band were playing. Yet, the very next day, I first heard the word ‘asexual,’ in my head. It thus took an imaginary Latin utopia to seal my discovery of asexuality. Yet, as section 4.3 will show, Zumba and lived experiences of travel to and from a real Latin America enabled my transformation.

4.3 - Cultivating inner ecstasy: Identities in flux

In this section, I navigate my shifting relationship with (a)sexualities by drawing on a specific encounter in Puerto Rico, a small Caribbean island, in November 2014. This serves to highlight the Caribbean as a locus for Zorbitality, representing historical transformation and hybridity, and the historical transformation of my own (a)sexuality. My transformation resonates with Frohlick’s (2013) work on Western women tourists’ intimate and libidinal transformations on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, where ‘the sensory dimensions of the place’ (Frohlick 2013: 70) were key to these transformations. Yet, the navy blue dress from the scene of ‘The Postfeminist Blues’ acts as a mechanism that connects my previous ‘asexual’ self to my subjective dance in this scene.

I draw on Malbon’s (1999: 105) concept of ‘oceanic experiences,’ as ecstatic experiences that cause one to go beyond perceptions of oneself. Even though I was not physically moving in this scene, my identity was in flux. This supports

Malbon's (*ibid*: 86) assertion that ordinary gestures can become a dance if a 'transformation' takes place, which allows one to enter 'a world of heightened sensitivity and altered perception of self, others and/or the environment.' Yet, I also wish to highlight the sense of ambivalent agency that I drew on when discussing Reavey's (2010) work.¹⁴⁹ In autobiographical passage 4, I revel in the new dance of my subjectivity. Yet, in autobiographical passage 5, I reflect on the dynamics that danced underneath the surface of the encounter.¹⁵⁰

Autobiographical passage 4:

Dancing at the edge of sea and sky: November 2014 - 09/12/2014, diary 2, pp. 110-115.

[It all started with a conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where the girl in the navy blue dress was presenting a paper titled: 'Beating the Postfeminist Blues? Female asexual identities and the limits of transgression.' What ensued was not wholly as expected, as she met a certain Puerto Rican waiter in a café she frequented...]

You slipped me a note
 With my receipt.
 Behind my coffee cup
 I rejoiced.
 The creamy incandescence
 Of my *café con leche*
 Could scarcely conceal
 My joy,
 As I drank in my expectations
 Of you
 Who asked me did I have any plans
 For my last night in Old San Juan.

By cobblestones and candlelight
 We revelled in words and song
 At the poetry passage,
 Sipping craft beer
 As I attempted to learn our
 Common language.
 As we watched a young mother
 Rocking her baby on her knee
 Reciting a poem of lost love -

¹⁴⁹ See autobiographical passage 2 (pp. 144-150) and my analysis of Anna's memory in section 5.4 (pp. 212-217).

¹⁵⁰ A similar process was enacted by Rachel in Woolf's (2009 [1915]) *The Voyage Out* (see my discussion on pp. 92-97).

Of not spending the rest of her
 Years with the man she
 Had thought she would.

Our chatter became incessant
 Amongst the constant calls of
*'Wepa.'*¹⁵¹
 You took me to a bar
 On San Sebastian
 Where you taught me
 Spanish on a napkin
 And I resurrected my Irish.
 'You have beautiful eyes.'
'Tienes hermosos ojos.'

You led
 Me to the edge.
 To the rolling waves and
 Rustling plains
 Of the ancient fort
El Morro.
 A dark sky dotted with little
 Flecks of gold.
 I saw your soul.
 You told me you felt like kissing me.
 I told you
 'I'd say go for it.'
 I did not think.
 I relented.

We reached each other
 And connected
 As the boundaries of sea
 And sky became blurred.
 Revelling in each others' spirits.
 In each others' tongues.
 Tongues in flames.
 A fort on fire.
 Limbs of the licking flames
 Reaching and folding.
 A bonfire of souls,
 Feeling each others'
 Boundaries.
 Going too far...
 Yes, too far.
 And retreating.

¹⁵¹ This is a phrase of jubilation used amongst Hispanics, especially Puerto Ricans.

A calming moment.
 Gentle caresses.
 A light rain comes.
 I leave wet and flushed.
 I will not see you
 Anytime soon.

Back in New York
 I viewed Mark Rothko's
 'Slow swirl at the edge of the sea.'¹⁵²
 Two painted creatures
 Dance between sea and sky.
 I remembered you
 And knew that nothing could
 Match the brilliance
 Of our meeting
 In each others' embrace.
 The memory of your touch.
 But that girl in a navy blue dress
 Nipped in at the waist
 Revealing a chiselled form
 Had been awakened that night
 The navy blue dress
 From the scene of the postfeminist blues.¹⁵³

Autobiographical passage 5:

Back on land - 09/12/2014, diary 2, pp. 118-122.

Back to this puppetry display.
 I viewed the scene anew.
 You kissed me.
 You pulled at my hair
 You tugged at my
 Navy blue dress
 And its gathering ribbon
 But I was afraid
 That you would tear
 My delicate ribbon
 And cherished opal chain,
 Opulently set
 On this golden statuette of submission,
 As all the time the phrases
 'Chaotic sexuality' and
 'A girl is a half-formed thing'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² This reference alludes to Rothko's (1944) painting, which is exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁵³ See *Autobiographical Passage 3* (pp. 151-154).

Swirled round and round in my head.

The wedges (cream this time)
 Put her on a podium.
 Her
 She
 But also I.
 And also you.
 You.
 I drank in you.
 You drank in me
 And ate me up
 On a golden spoon.
 A frozen statuette
 Gleaming like a beacon.
 You asked me if I had
 Ever had a boyfriend.
 I said 'No
 You asked
 'Why not?'
 I said
 I'm incredibly independent...

You told me that I was so beautiful
 That I had an amazing body
 That you were aroused
 And that you felt like getting more mischievous
 As your hand crept further up my right thigh.
 I froze and you sensed my discomfort.
 You retreated.
 I remained silent
 I did not feel in control
 But somehow I was enjoying it.

Dispersed from the convent,
 Evicted at this early hour.
 Drinking in the night sky
 And the rolling waves.
 Intoxicated by another,
 To return many moons later
 Wet and refreshed
 Having drunk not from the Holy Water font
 But the elixir of desire
 A desire consuming
 Yet contained

¹⁵⁴ This reference alludes to Eimear McBride's (2014) award-winning novel, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, which provides an insight into the turbulent sexuality of a vulnerable young woman who experienced sexual abuse during childhood, and her enduring relationship with her ill brother.

Not desiring full consummation.

That girl
 Half way between
 A courtesan
 And the aloof woman of
 Klimt's 'The Kiss.'¹⁵⁵
 A girl relenting,
 Allowing herself to be kissed.
 Frozen in a moment
 Yet simultaneously consumed.
 Surrounded by gold leaf stars -
 A glittering golden statuette
 In those night-time revellings.

*

In the months prior to my Circum-Caribbean navigation from New York to Puerto Rico and back, I had been experiencing distress with regards to my asexuality. Researching the topic daily was taking its toll, and making me feel incredibly vulnerable. I had not yet conceptualised Zorbitality as a resistant imaginary. Instead, I had internalised the figure of the female 'asexual.' I still found moments of happiness when I did Zumba. Yet, I regularly burst into tears. I had reached an impasse. I was not sure if the pain of researching this topic was worth it. Therefore, the New York/Puerto Rico trip was a lifeline, since as Frohlick (2013) observes, travel can transform women's intimate trajectories.

Having enjoyed the grid-like linearity of New York, I left for San Juan, Puerto Rico. I gave my paper on the genealogy of female (a)sexualities, where I invoked such characters as the frigid woman and the postfeminist single woman. Yet, I attended very little of the conference. I wanted to distance myself from asexuality and from the need for verbal interpretation that all academic work seems to require.

¹⁵⁵ This reference alludes to Klimt's infamous (1907-1908) painting, *The Kiss*, which has been the source of much scholarly debate. It is often asked if the woman in the painting is actually enjoying the kiss, as she appears to pull away from her lover. This, of course, is an open question. The painting is rich in symbolism, with the male covered in rectangles, a mythical symbol of masculinity, and the woman covered in circles, a symbol of femininity. The woman is rooted to the earth, a connection that is often made in mythology. The painting is covered in gold leaf, which was common in Medieval spiritual painting. In the scene I narrate, the Klimt reference relates to the girl in the blue dress's conflicting feelings surrounding the kiss, but also to the fact that she was wearing dangling gold earrings while it was happening.

I felt uncomfortable in San Juan. I could not deal with the constant wolf whistling and feeling that I was being lasciviously watched. I got severely bitten by mosquitoes and my ankles and wrists swelled up. I heard salsa music and my favourite Zumba songs being played from bars. Yet, I could not enter, as I was sure of the heteronormative politics and dyadic formations I would be confronted with. The one note of stability was a café that I used to go, where I met a nice waiter, M, who is the intimate other of this memory.

The first scene I have just described (autobiographical passage 4) set in motion the Zorbitality of this thesis, through the scene of a kiss at the ancient fort, *El Morro*, in San Juan, Puerto Rico. What strikes me about the scene is that it follows a conventional romantic narrative, perhaps to an excessive extent. There was the note written on the back of the receipt, the romantic poetry café, the bar where we flirted and the ultimate climax of the fort. These spatial markers set the scene. In my normal life, I would have felt nauseous at their hyper-romanticism. Yet, in those liminal moments, the evening before I was due to return to New York, I felt like going with the flow. As Ahmed (2006) highlights, the role of the body in *disorientation* plays a huge role in how perceptions of our sexual orientations may shift over time. We may find ourselves re-oriented in stability or reaching out for something that we simply cannot grasp: 'The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do – whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope' (*ibid*: 158). Indeed, my experiences did offer me hope. They resonated with Ahmed's assertion that it is not so much a question of 'what is a queer orientation, but how we are orientated toward queer moments when objects slip' (*ibid*: 171). Indeed, this was a very queer moment indeed, where I saw myself dancing at the edge of sea and sky. The images in the scene evoke a sense of movement. Yet, the scene also concerns itself with boundaries: both the need to establish safe boundaries and to become enmeshed with another, where linear time is forgotten and transformation is key to the process itself.

'Feeling each others'
Boundaries.
Going too far...

Yes, too far.
And retreating.'

The liminality suggested in these words connects with Winchester, McGuirk and Everett's (1999) paper, which explores the transforming identities of teenagers during Schoolies Week, on the Gold Coast of Australia. The authors narrate how this was a transitional phase, 'where identities in the process of transformation become fluid' (*ibid*: 60). Significantly, they assert that this transformation had a spatial dimension, since it took place on a piece of land overlooking a vast ocean, much like my scene at *El Morro*. Thus, I agree that liminality is produced by both place and the 'carnavalesque loss of identity' (Shields 1991: 97).¹⁵⁶

This memory brought me to Zorbitality, through the process that Braidotti (2006: 172) calls 'multi-layered levels of affectivity,' which are 'the building blocks for creative transpositions' and 'mark heightened levels of awareness and receptivity.' It was pivotal in my trajectory, for it challenged the internalised view of myself as a female 'asexual.' Yet, it also made me experience a sense of loss for something intangible, which speaks to Butler's (2004: 18) account of 'the transformative effect of loss.' My pining was for a moment of deep closeness with another human being. This is perhaps why viewing Marc Rothko's painting, *Slow Swirl at the edge of sea and sky*, on my return visit to New York had such a profound effect on me. As Butler asserts, loss is encountered in moments where we inhabit a space between self and world. In the process, we become 'undone' by another, 'by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel' (*ibid*: 19). This is strongly reflected in my reference to 'the memory of your touch.'

Autobiographical passage 4 reflects an awareness of my (a)sexuality not as cold, but as sensuous, relational and dancing. Yet, in autobiographical passage 5, I begin to question the underlying dynamics of the *El Morro* scene. In this passage, I question the romantic and sexual scripts that dance under its surface and unearth a feeling of being colonised against my will, which exists in tension with the tenderness I evoke in passage 4. Movement is central to this

¹⁵⁶ This invokes Bakhtin's (1941) notion of 'the carnivalesque' in literature.

questioning. It is suggested in the images of 'chaotic sexuality' that 'swirled round and round in my head.' Indeed, the image of the spiral has been invoked at various stages in this thesis. It is central to Anzaldúa's (1999) work on borderlands, where she highlights the spiral as a symbol for collective transformation in Aztec culture. In resonance with this, I experience a blurring between self and Other. This displacement causes me to reflect on the verbal exchanges we had at *El Morro*, which referenced heteronormative structures (for example: M asking me did I have a boyfriend). As in my previous passages, agency emerges as an ambivalent site, where I feel out of control: 'But somehow I was enjoying it.' My further reference to 'the convent' both evokes the ex-convent hotel I was staying in, in Old San Juan, as well as my past life as a Catholic. Yet, I experience a desire 'not desiring full consummation.' The word 'full' references the assumption that heterosexual sex always ends in penetration, something that I did not want.

It is also significant that the scene subsequently conjures up the image of Klimt's painting, *The Kiss*, which embodies both movement and stasis. The woman in the painting, being kissed by a man, appears rigid, yet is surrounded by moving spirals. In resonance with this, in the final lines of this passage, I am attempting to explore what my shifting relationship with space is. In the *El Morro* scene, was I really in movement? All I can say is that the scene *enabled* transformation. I came to autoeroticism in the days and months following the encounter, as a means of recreating its sensuousness. I had reached out to someone, and also to a broader cosmos. Puerto Rico became a recognisable location on my everyday mental horizons - partially fantasy and partially reality - which enriched my developing conception of intimacy. Whilst these scenes can never be physically recreated,¹⁵⁷ I reach a sense of inner ecstasy any time I re-imagine them, and this is part of their power.

In sections 4.2 and 4.3, I progressed my thesis of Zorbitality by examining the first two facets of the Zorbital process, vulnerability and inner ecstasy. I also

¹⁵⁷ This lack of replicability was also highlighted in Anna's and Ruth's memories in section 5.4 (see pp. 212-220). In a different manner to objective scientific inquiry, I argue that the uniqueness of these moments actually empowers subjective transformation.

highlighted the Caribbean as both a locus for Zorbitality and the transformation of my own (a)sexuality. In section 4.4, I will examine the powerful role of Zumba in my personal trajectory, working through memories of collective ecstatic motion.

4.4 - Zorbitality: The collective ecstatic motion of Zumba¹⁵⁸

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the emergent concept of Zorbitality reaches its strongest synthesis when it is experienced as a physically embodied collective movement rite. Furthermore, Zorbitality highlights the important role of the imagination in the process of remembering (see Keightley and Pickering 2012; Levitas 2013). Zorbitality reaches its strongest manifestation as an *internalisation* of the collective, without others needing to be present. Zorbitality thus acts as a resistant imaginary, which sustains one in moments of vulnerability.

Autobiographical passages 6 to 8 examine the specific conditions necessary for collective ecstatic motion to be reached. I firstly narrate a memory that explores the relationship between vulnerability and the power of the Zumba collective (autobiographical passage 6). Secondly, I evoke the constraining nature of couple dance (autobiographical passage 7), before examining how ecstasy is achieved through movement itself (autobiographical passage 8). Finally, in autobiographical passage 9, I narrate a scene from Cuba in May 2016, which highlights the full Zorbital process. By turning vulnerability to strength by dancing solo on a rooftop in Baracoa, I show how Zumba's deconstruction of Afro-diasporic couple dance unearths the collective West African danced rites prior to colonisation, which placed emphasis on solo dance within a collective. I also nod to Dionysian rites of collective ecstasy, which were suppressed through Western colonisation of the New World. Through an internalisation of a collective spirit, Zumba offers a resistant imaginary, where one feels a connection with others, even if one dances alone.

¹⁵⁸ I draw on Zumba as a central example, but as mentioned previously, Zorbitality can be reached through other collective ecstatic movement rites.

Autobiographical passage 6:**The Chosen One¹⁵⁹ - 22/03/2015, diary 3, pp. 171-172.**

[It's the night of the Spring Equinox. Dancing girls celebrate the birthday of their Zumba teacher, a strong and beautiful Rwandan woman. During the course of the dance, the Sage will choose his victim.]

Last night I danced on a table
 With my Zumba friends.
 Celebrating our teacher's birthday
 Reggaeton style.¹⁶⁰

A group of men looked on
 As we each took turns
 To strut our stuff,
 To sell our wares,
 To dance on the podium.

I had to be pushed
 But I danced.
 I felt both gratified by the
 Cheers
 And foolish,
 Not because I couldn't move
 But because I didn't move
 With my usual gusto.

I felt frozen in movement
 Whilst thinking all the while
 That this was the
 Postfeminist me.
 Dancing
 For men.
 As they watched on.
 The dancing woman.
 The sacrificial victim.

But sometimes
 She victimises
 Herself.

She will be the Chosen One.
 She has sacrificed herself
 On the high altar

¹⁵⁹ This scene refers to the Chosen One of Stravinsky's twentieth-century ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1913), which I described in section 3.2 (see pp. 104-107).

¹⁶⁰ As I mentioned in section 3.4, reggaeton is one of the four core rhythms of Zumba. It is often associated with sexually explicit lyrics and dance movements. See Rivera, Marshall and Pacini Hernandez (2009).

For the Spring Equinox
 [Fate knew that the date would coincide]
 With the Middle Eastern New Year.

She celebrates the entrance of the
 Sage
 And the wise old men.
 She has anointed herself as
 Chosen.

They saw her virginity.
 Her fragility.
 Not the comfortable exuberant
 African women who danced
 On the podium,
 Celebrating the movement of their bodies
 For themselves.

All eyes gazed on her,
 The sacrificial victim.

The Sage
 Has made his choice.
 It is her.
 It is she.
 The sacrificial virgin
 The girl in the navy blue dress
 Now wearing a sweat-stained
 Red cotton number.
 Dancing at the altar
 Of the
 Rite of Spring.

*

In this passage, two personal identities collide: a past identity as a Classical cellist and a new identity as a member of a Zumba collective. A deep connection between music, identity and sexuality is evidenced, both in my desire to rewrite my identity during that period (Spring 2015) and through my invocation of the Chosen One of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. As I described in section 3.2 (see pp. 104-107), the progressive harmonies, atonality, obscure rhythms and unconventional choreographic gestures of Stravinsky's work enable us to rethink sexual difference (Banes 1998). Furthermore, as Cixous (1997: 46) notes, this has a complex relationship with the writing process: 'To write is to note down the music of the world, the music of the body, the music of time.' As

she suggests, sexual difference is reflected in the relationship between musical notes, sound and silence and instruments of different sonorities. Yet, somehow I feel that playing music is now dead to me, that I cannot fully articulate the depth of my self through a static instrument. I do not want to be reduced to the sexualised femininity of the woman-shaped cello. My body is my instrument now, writing its articulation and collective motion its driving force. Yet, in this passage, I also questioned whether my moving body was a static instrument.

This passage highlights an ambivalent pathway to collective ecstatic motion. It shows how personal vulnerability can coincide with collective joy. Indeed, as Arendt (1958) highlights, vulnerability is a relational process, and it is in our engagement with others that we may gain strength. I had built up such a rapport with my Zumba colleagues that I could go beyond my everyday self. This scene perhaps embodies the destructive element of Dionysus (see Storm 1998), since I lost track of linear time and transcended my usual self, yet could not surpass the male gaze. When I read back on the memory, I feel slightly uncomfortable, as I remember the scene of the Postfeminist Blues (see pp. 151-154), where I was forced to walk away from a lecherous oaf, as an act of silent defiance. Yet here, when I am with my Zumba friends, I dance on a table, as men watch and we each take turns to 'strut our stuff' and 'sell our wares.' This may seem like an example of postfeminist pastiche (see McRobbie 2009), where I actively objectify myself. Yet, this is grossly simplistic. It is true that I was 'pushed' to dance and felt 'frozen in movement.' Yet, as in Blacking's (1977) ethnography of African dance, the collective propelled us to ecstatically move, regardless of the gaze.

In this passage, I do not seek to essentialise the African women I am dancing with, since as Mbembe (2002) argues, there is no such thing as a unitary African subject. Rather, I wish to highlight their strength and ownership of their bodies, much like the women in Katherine Dunham's *Rites de Passage* (1941), which I discussed in section 3.2 (see pp. 107-110). I perhaps only felt meek because I did not perceive myself to have the confidence they seemed to possess. Perhaps that was my projection. Yet, it influenced how I felt, since I viewed myself as

‘the sacrificial victim,’ who was dancing at the sacrificial altar. The navy blue dress of my transformative encounters was now transformed into a ‘sweat-stained red cotton number.’¹⁶¹

This passage does not quite reach what I define as Zorbitality. The power of the collective is evident but I am all too aware of my naivety, and feel ‘asexual.’ This memory allows me to think of the particular *spatial* markers that are required for collective ecstasy to be reached. These markers involve both the celebration of *personal movement styles* and the use of *common resistant rhythms*. These features are found in the Zumba class, where the boundaries between bodies are respected and a collective spirit is channelled through shared rhythms. I will return to this point in autobiographical passage 9. However, to presage this, I will firstly critique the dominant dyadic formation in Latin social dance (autobiographical passage 7) and explore the power of movement itself (autobiographical passage 8).

Autobiographical passage 7:

Let’s Tango: May 2010 - 20/09/2013, diary 1, p. 65.

Tango classes were
a disaster.

One man looked deep into her eyes
Another commented on how nervous she was
Another fretted about her tendency to lead
rather than follow...

She clearly does not like being led
By men.

*

As I described in section 3.3,¹⁶² Argentinean tango was one of the first strict couple dances to emerge from Western colonisation of the New World, in the late nineteenth century (see Farris Brown 2006). Before this, set dances had

¹⁶¹ Indeed, the Chosen One of Bausch’s (1975) production of Stravinsky’s *Rite* is forced to wear a red dress!

¹⁶² See footnote 115, p. 115.

been common, where people danced with multiple partners and gender roles were not stratified. Tango thus resulted from the democratisation of the dance floor, which naturalised the dyad and coincided with the emergence of bourgeois capitalism.

This passage I have just narrated emerged from an eight-week tango course I took in 2010. I did not enjoy the lessons because of the leader and follower divide, and the dyadic configuration. Whilst possibilities do exist for challenging this hierarchy (see McClure 2015), in this case the structures were too rigidly defined. I hated the feeling of extreme closeness, which is also evoked in Savigliano's (1998: 105) assertion that tango is 'ruled by the laws of naked seduction.' Yet, significantly, my resistant voice emerges:

'She clearly does not like being led
By men.'

My experiences of tango resonate with a Latin dance scene in Sylvia Plath's (1966 [1963]) novel, *The Bell Jar*. In this scene, a Peruvian man, Marco, forces the central character, Esther, to dance to Latin music at a party. He expects her to follow him to the dance floor. Instead, Esther hangs on to her fourth daiquiri and firmly says 'No.' In their exchange, Marco's *machismo*¹⁶³ is evident:

'It's a tango.' Marco manoeuvred me out among the dancers.
'I love tangos.'
'I can't dance.'
'You don't have to dance. I'll do the dancing' (*ibid*: 112).

Marco's words reflect Tobin's (1998: 90) comment that 'the primary relation in *tango* is not between the heterosexual dance partners, but is between the man who dances with a woman and the other men who watch.' Instead of leaving her be, Marco puts an arm around Esther's waist and presses her towards him. He then says: 'Pretend you are drowning' (Plath 1966 [1963]: 112). Esther feels as if her body has been drained of its own volition:

I shut my eyes, and the music broke over me like a rainstorm. Marco's leg slid forward against mine and my leg slid back and I seemed to be riveted to him, limb for limb, moving as he moved, without any will or

¹⁶³ *Machismo* refers to a stereotyped view that Latin American men practice misogyny in their dealings with women. See Katherine's memory, section 5.2 (pp. 192-199) for a more detailed analysis.

knowledge of my own, and after a while I thought, 'It doesn't take two to dance, it only takes one,' and I let myself blow and bend like a tree in the wind (*ibid*: 112-113).

In this scene, Esther is stripped of her agency. She feels like a ventriloquist's dummy. Her account, much like mine, demonstrates the hierarchal arrangement of male and female, with the male naturally being granted the leader's role.¹⁶⁴ This sometimes inhibits female bodily agency and creates a dynamic, where a man is given licence to critique a woman's dancing on how well she follows. In Esther's case, Marco tells her that she is 'a perfectly respectable dancer' (*ibid*: 113). Yet, Esther's inhibition is provoked not by her fear of the dance itself but rather because she is expected to perform a certain role in a dyadic formation.¹⁶⁵ It is not surprising that the scene ends with Marco's attempted seduction of Esther. Marco tears the strap of Esther's dress and calls her a 'Slut' (*ibid*: 114). Yet, adopting her leadership role in this situation, Esther resorts to physical violence.¹⁶⁶ Whilst the 'passion' of my tango classes did not end in violence, I could still identify with the feeling of being extremely constrained. This speaks volumes of how we need to offer alternative dance floor spaces where *everybody* can feel safe to move freely.

In the next passage, I focus on the power of movement *itself* in transcending dualisms, whether mind/body, sex/gender, hetero/homosexual, in the space of the club dance floor. As Malbon's (1999) work on clubbing culture highlights, ecstatic movement offers a liminal space of non-identity, which is productive and liberating. It brings people together without having to ask questions concerning identity or sexuality. Yet, I argue that the clubbing space does not succeed in creating a sense of collective identification.

¹⁶⁴ Aggiss and Cowie deconstructed the tango in *Die Orchidee im Plastik Karten ist Die Blumen für Die Damen* (1988), a work for 13 female dancers. One section featured a *Tango Connie? Ostinato*. The dancers stood in lines, with one leg in front of the other. Partnerships were only hinted at. In an ironic touch, a rose was passed between the dancers' legs with robot-like movements, thus parodying the stereotyped passion of the tango, whilst the women made orgasmic cries. See Briginshaw (2006) for a more detailed description.

¹⁶⁵ Yet, as Kabir (2013) notes, experienced dancers often lose the leader/ follower divide. As Magna Gopal's following skills demonstrate, *salseras* can improvise in innovative ways.

¹⁶⁶ A similar fate awaits the male protagonist in Katherine's memory in section 5.2 (see pp. 192-199).

Autobiographical passage 8:**The girl who danced herself to life - 16/10/2013, diary 1, p. 38.**

When she danced
 It was as if she was dancing herself to death.
 The rhythm pulsed through her body.
 She did not need alcohol or drugs.
 The music was her drug of choice,
 Movement its articulatory gesture.
 Sexless
 Genderless
 Just pure movement
 Pure joy
 Pure energy
 Pure ecstasy
 It was if she was in the throws of passion
 But this was *her* way of expressing it.
 Her body working to its full capacity
 Moving with conviction and rhythm,
 Admired for its strength
 Dancing itself a heavenly death.

*

In this passage, I pay homage to one of the people who instilled my love for dance: A, an Italian humanities scholar and dancer, who I met whilst studying for my Masters. Although we grew apart towards the end of her time in London, thus illustrating that relationships are both gained and lost on the dance floor, I am forever thankful to her. A skilled dancer, in the tradition of Pina Bausch,¹⁶⁷ she would nurture my innate energy and expressivity. Whenever I met A, the friendly and lively person I had always wanted to be would emerge. We started going to the Blues Kitchen in Camden at the weekends, where we would engage in what we affectionately called 'crazy dancing.' At first, I was aware that everybody looked at A, because she had the moves. Yet, as the weeks went by, my innate energy emerged. Soon, we would both develop our mutual empire on the dance floor. Indeed, I would develop my own style, which has subsequently influenced my approach to Zumba: 'Just enjoy the movement.'

¹⁶⁷ Pina Bausch was a German choreographer. Her style was described as *Tanztheater* (dance theatre). It celebrated the absurdity of the everyday through repetitive motifs. Her work also explored the power dynamics of gender relations.

As this passage shows, contrary to the expectations of the ‘clubbing’ experience (see Malbon 1999), for Zorbitality to be enacted, no chemical inducement need be involved. Zorbitality is found in ‘oceanic experiences’ (*ibid*: 105), where one moves beyond oneself and reaches new horizons. Equally, one experiences the process of ‘becoming imperceptible’ (Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1980]; 308-311), which implies the death of the self to any notions of identity. In this passage, I become genderless and sexless in an ecstatic sense, since categories do not matter any more. It thus demonstrates an alternative libidinal economy, governed by collective ecstatic motion. The realm of the ‘sexual’ is evoked but solo dance within a collective is its specific configuration. Counter to autobiographical passage 2 (see pp. 144-150), where my movements were governed by the death drives of patriarchy, in this passage death becomes a symbol for life, through physically embodied collective ecstatic motion.¹⁶⁸

However, what this passage lacks is a deeper articulation of the collective. I celebrate my personal style of movement. Yet, I do not draw on a set of common resistant rhythms. Zumba addresses this deficit, through its shared rhythms, which create new local and global communities. Furthermore, Zumba’s deconstruction of the dyad grounds a new libidinal economy where *all* people can be held, and female bodies can express themselves beyond patriarchal formations. As I described in section 3.4 (see pp. 119-135), it is a central example of ‘Zorbitality,’ which can be enacted through the internalisation of the collective spirit of *any* collective movement rite. This internalisation acts as a resistant imaginary, which enables one to transcend any vulnerabilities in the everyday. It appeals to Braidotti’s (2006: 33) sustainable nomadic ethics, as a new cultural ethics that embodies an ethical openness to otherness, and views trauma as a generative possibility. I will explore this in autobiographical passage 9, but in order to presage this, I will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the phenomenology of Zumba.

¹⁶⁸ See also my account of Rachel’s death in Woolf’s (2009 [1915]) *The Voyage Out* (section 3.1, pp. 96-97).

Zumba: Becoming my dance¹⁶⁹

Zumba is an encounter with my body within time and space, a manifestation of what Fraleigh (1987: 183) calls 'moving time-space.' It exists outside the normal flow of time. Ordinarily, I relate to Young's (2005 [1980]: 38) conception of 'inhibited intentionality,' where my body feels constrained within space, and fears spontaneous movement. However, when I Zumba, I become the carefree child I never felt like I was. I move with what Fraleigh (1987: 19) calls 'intentional motion.'

When I Zumba, I throw my body into space. There is no need for external objects. Part of the reason I used to dread sports at school was because of a fear of objects: that moving ball that sometimes hit me in the face and the possibility of once again 'throwing like a girl,' to use the title of Young's (2005 [1980]) essay. Another tragic-comic example was when I fell off a spacehopper at a school sports day and hit my head off a wall. I felt like my body had failed me and it took great conviction to believe in it again. In fact, I tried one Zumba class in Ireland a few years before I moved to London and hated it. I felt horribly uncoordinated and inhibited, as if this exuberant style was not for me. Yet, within three weeks of starting Zumba classes in London, I became obsessed. My inhibitions fled without me even willing them away. My love grew, under the tutelage of three inspiring women, all of whom I deeply admire and who are equally inspired by my energy. The first is an elegant Chilean dancer, who gave me private dance lessons (both basic ballet and Latin dance) in exchange for teaching her son piano. I was in awe of her. She once told me that when she saw me moving it made her 'happy.' The second is a radiant Rwandan woman, who I referenced in autobiographical passage 6, full of energy and positivity. I will never forget Tuesday night and Saturday afternoon Zumba classes with her, wonderful dots of intensity that punctuated my week. The sense of collective joy always radiated in the room.¹⁷⁰ The third is a feisty Hispanic/ creole woman, whose style has an urban edge. Her strength and passion are admirable.

¹⁶⁹ The decision to speak about Zumba again in this section may seem repetitive. However, it is deliberate. I draw on it here as an example of self-reflexivity.

¹⁷⁰ With great sadness, my wonderful Rwandan teacher does not teach at the gym any more. It feels like the end of an era. Yet, communities need to be continuously built and rebuilt.

Whilst sometimes I feel like an imposter – a dancer with no training and a fitness instructor who still fears going near a spacehopper – I am becoming the dancer I never was. I now teach others Zumba and it makes me realise, in the spirit of Hans Jonas's (1966) work, that no matter how vulnerable the label of 'asexuality' makes me feel in the world, there is always possible freedom. I make my mark in time and space with intentional and purposeful movement, leading and motivating others in the process. There is great power in that. In essence, I have come to what Fraleigh (1987: 27) calls a 'whole-body consciousness.' Dance is a form of knowledge for me, both lived and thought through the body. Like the possibilities of different choreographies, I find the actualisation of many possible selves in Zumba. Becoming a choreographer brings me closer to a more creative stance on female (a)sexualities, as I realise that we are always engaging in creative movement. The steps I take ultimately decide my future direction. I carry Zumba with me in *all* my endeavours. Zumba's marketing slogan, 'Let it move you,' is not just a marketing ploy. Yet, to be more specific, I do as Fraleigh (*ibid*: 18) suggests: 'I move myself.'

I will now advance my thesis by drawing on an extended passage, which explores my recent experiences in Cuba. Going to Cuba could be seen as a second return for me. My experiences in Puerto Rico in November 2014 (see pp. 154-162), enabled a personal transformation. Whilst such a transformation did not occur in Cuba, my experiences acted as a confirmation of what can be perceived as 'Zorbitality.' Whilst I longed to dance in Cuba, couple dance reigned supreme. I viscerally felt the 'colonial wound' that Mignolo (2005: 8) describes, where indigenous and African collective movement rites were suppressed by the Western colonisers, through the naturalisation of the dyad. Because of the space I would not dance. Furthermore, it was not just a matter of intent. I *could* not dance. It would have violated me. This experience made me feel vulnerable. Yet, I found strength as one day I danced alone on a rooftop terrace, overlooking the mountains in Baracoa.

Autobiographical passage 9:**Dancing on the edge of time: May 2016 - 27/07/2016, diary 4, pp. 62-68.**

We were at the *Casa de la música* in Trinidad, Cuba. Salsa rhythms pulsated. Salsa pulls at my heart strings. It expresses great joy, yet simultaneous sorrow. It is music to be danced to. I¹⁷¹ was experiencing it in situ, in the land that gave birth to *son*, salsa's originating rhythm.¹⁷² Yet, I felt dead. I knew I could not dance in this space. Couple after couple took to the floor. '¿Quiere bailar?' I was continuously asked. 'No, gracias,' I was conditioned to reply. This pained me. In a Zumba class, I always want to move. Yet, on this night I was no more than an ethnographic observer.

There were two particular cases I noted. Firstly, one woman danced on her own on the sidelines of the dance floor. She did her own little dance, unassuming, not looking for attention. She smiled and seemed to enjoy her own rhythms, doing a little turn at the end of each phrase. After a while, a serial ladykiller, a man who had already flashily danced with a number of other women, approached her. I would presume he imagined: 'Why would a woman be dancing on her own?' (God forbid!). She initially shook her head and said 'no' but after another few requests, she relented. I watched them as they approached the dance floor. She seemed nervous. As he led her, her movements became stiff. She still smiled, but to me she appeared like a doll or a ventriloquist's dummy, her natural rhythm suppressed. Of course this was an observation, but it was one made on the basis of her bodily gestures.

The second example I can note is that of a woman who was evidently a skilled Western salsa dancer. She was dancing with a local. I watched as he forcefully twisted and turned her and chided her slightly if she could not follow some of his turns. He gestured and spoke with a note of frustration on his face, suggesting what she should do. Perhaps this was a salsa lesson in action. I will never know. Yet, I was very uncomfortable with the dynamics of this situation. I want to move for myself. I want to lead others, without force. I was reminded of this a few nights later when we attended a folkloric African dance show, where women and men engaged in solo dances, celebrating individual movement within a collective. Even when all the dancers danced together, there was a sense that the space of each individual body was being respected. Bodies did not have to be touched or led in a hierarchical formation. I would happily have danced on stage with them. My heart surged.

¹⁷¹ I return to 'I' in this section, rather than 'she,' as I wish to bring this account back to my experiences as a woman living in 2016.

¹⁷² *Son* has influenced the development of dance music throughout Latin America, and has its roots in the abolition of the slave trade in the late nineteenth century (Roy 2002). Drawing on African traditions, it features a call and response structure, with percussion playing a prominent role. As noted by Roberts (1992: 8), the *clave*, a 3-2 rhythmic pattern that emerged in *son* would later become synonymous with salsa.

On the second part of our Cuba tour, we went to Santiago de Cuba, the birthplace of many Afro-diasporic dance genres. We met other travellers on our way, one of whom was a skilled dancer, who enjoyed couple dancing. At each bar, she would dance with the locals. I felt sad. I longed to move but again, I couldn't in this space. My spirit felt dampened. I told these new people I was a Zumba teacher and I felt the weight of their expectations. I imagined them thinking: 'She's a Zumba teacher. She should be like a maniac on the dance floor.' The sad reality is that I normally am. Yet, one evening, as we went to a Latin nightclub, crowded and with the music pulsating, I was incredibly still. I was asked to dance repeatedly and said 'No.' But I had nowhere to hide. In fact I felt like disappearing. This was nothing like the 'becoming-imperceptible' that Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1980]: 308-311) narrate, and which I experience in Zumba, where I become at one with others and the world. I cried myself to sleep that night, wishing I could disappear without a trace.

Days later, near the end of our journey, in Baracoa, the Eastern-most town of Cuba, which looks to Haiti and at a double jump, Puerto Rico, we stayed in an accommodation with a rooftop. From here, we had a view over the rolling hills and mountains, the very mountains that gave birth to *son* as a musical genre. I spent a lot of alone time here, wanting to disappear, since I could not move. Yet, one day, I found my Zorbitality. With composure, I walked down to the bedroom, got my ipod, walked back to the roof terrace and saluted the sun. I turned on my music, desperately searching for my Zumba class playlist. I selected my favourite merengue track, *Vive y baila* (one lives and one dances). At first my movements were bashful, as it had been almost three weeks since I had Zumba-ed. Yet, after a few seconds I had already found my stride. I not only felt at one with the natural beauty surrounding me but somehow with other people: those I could see lounging on their porches below, and my loved ones, who I imagined in my mind's eye, moving in synchrony with me. This was the biggest confirmation for me of what Zumba does. It evokes the decoupled Latin dance, driven by solo African dance in a collective. It challenges the innateness of the dyad and celebrates the joy of movement itself, even if Zumba's role as capitalist enterprise exists in tension with its rhythmic roots. As I worked through my playlist, I felt alive again. I felt present. My body smiled. And with that I realised that I needed no further proof of what I term Zorbitality. This was it: decoupled ecstatic joyous movement, where new relational and movement configurations are offered up in the process of moving one's own body in orbit with others and the world.

*

This memory could be seen as an exemplification of the full Zorbital process. I initially experienced a sense of vulnerability within heteronormative structures. This inhibited my movement and reduced me to an 'ethnographic observer,' as I saw how various women were treated on the dance floor. In particular, I saw

how the women's movement physically stiffened in the couple formation and was reminded of De Beauvoir's (1949 [1953]: 295) words: 'She is treated like a live doll and is refused liberty.' I subsequently witnessed a devalued aspect of Latin social dance – West African collective danced rites – when I attended a folkloric African dance show. This made me think about the joy Zumba harnesses, even if it works within a capitalist flow that does not explicitly reveal how its adopted dance forms have their roots in oppression.

My retreat to Santiago de Cuba was a pilgrimage of sorts. Visiting a place where Afro-Caribbean rhythms reverberate on every street corner, yet feeling thoroughly paralysed, was a particularly distressing experience. The workings of the dyad undid me, and I was reminded of Butler's (2004) work, which highlights the constraining nature of heteronormative structures and the need to create a more ethical world for all people. Furthermore, I experienced the weight of expectation, as the serious and inhibited person I was around my fellow travellers went contrary to my normal vivacity in Zumba class. It led me to reflect on myself as 'asexual' and to devalue collective ecstasy. After all, it seemed like the couple was the mostly highly sought after configuration. Yet, this vulnerability turned to inner ecstasy as I experienced the power of Zorbitality, whilst overlooking the very mountains that had given birth to *son*. This highlights the rhythmic vitality of Caribbean rhythms (Benítez-Rojo 1996), as well as the Caribbean as a site of possibility, where identities may transform and new relational configurations may emerge (Glissant 1997).

When I reread my dance to life on the rooftop, I was reminded of a passage from Katherine Dunham's memoir, *Island Possessed* (1969). Dunham, who I mentioned in section 3.2 (see pp. 107-110), was an African American choreographer and anthropologist who went to Haiti to become initiated into the *vaudun* tradition. In the process, she found *herself*:

The joy of dancing overwhelmed me... in the ruptured movements of the feints, then gasping, stumbling, teetering on the verge of rhythm- and fast-induced hypnosis, returning to the sheer joy of motion in concert, of harmony with self and others... with all friends and enemies past, present, and future, with the wonders of the Haitian countryside and

with whatever god whose name we were venerating, because by then a number had been honored and I had lost track... (*ibid*: 131-132).

As Dunham's account highlights, her ecstasy was grounded in a feeling of deep connection with others, achieved through the internalisation of a collective spirit. She ethically opened herself to the expanse of nature, all people and multiple gods. I experienced a similar process:

I not only felt at one with the natural beauty of the world surrounding me but somehow with other people: those I could see lounging on their porches below me, and my loved ones, who I imagined in my mind's eye, moving in synchrony with me.

I had been extremely depressed, wanting to 'disappear without a trace.' Yet, in that moment, like Dunham, I 'found my stride.' I felt the presence of an enhanced collective that celebrates the idiosyncrasies of each human being, which is the basis of Braidotti's (2006: 33) sustainable nomadic ethics. Furthermore, my words resonate with Anderson's (1983) work on imagined communities, which highlights how our experiences of community do not emerge from everyday interactions, but rather from our imagined relational ties with communities of interest. In a similar way to Anderson, I realised that the concept of nationhood is a social construction, as I unearthed forgotten lineages of collective danced rites, grounded in decoupled ecstatic joyous movement. This process was deeply relational. It was a 'poetics of relation' (see Glissant 1997), where I reached out to an unspecified Other in an act of ethical opening. I extended myself to all those Zumba lovers in the world: both those I knew and those I had never met. I was thus reminded of Canetti's (1973 [1960]: 18) words: 'The space is theirs, even during the ebb, and in its emptiness it reminds them of the flood.' In that moment on the rooftop, memories of being with my Zumba colleagues, both from the classes I used to attend as a student and from the classes I now taught, flashed through my mind. Reaching this state of complete oneness with self and world required me to feel vulnerable and to reach a sense of inner ecstasy, from which an outer ecstasy was released through an internalisation of Zumba's collective spirit. In the process, I had enacted a resistant imaginary, which I could draw on as a sustainable future resource.

4.5 - Concluding remarks

In this piece of 'me-search' (Nguyen 2015), I have aimed to challenge the fixity of sexual orientation categories, highlight the inadequacy of identity categories in capturing the complexities of lived experience, and narrate moments of becoming in my trajectory where identities were in flux. I have sought to evoke a sense of movement through my poetic use of language and to convey how collective ecstatic motion can create embodied knowledge (Spry 2001). It is hoped this approach will both encourage stylistic creativity in future research and more importantly will allow the lived experiences of the body to become more central to the research process. Perhaps the most important point to draw from this chapter is that the emergent concept of Zorbitality offers a resistant imaginary, which finds its basis in collective ecstatic motion, yet is realised when this sense of motion is internalised. This process enables one to survive any threats to one's vulnerability and enables a permanent sense of transformation in women's libidinal lives. These points will form the basis of my collective biography work in the following chapters. This work will further highlight how we need to rework female (a)sexualities in terms of collective ecstatic motion, whilst creating a more ethical world for all humans.

Part III: Collective Biography

Introduction

In order to stage the collective biography work that follows, I want us to begin by re-evaluating the role of the collective in the twenty-first century, drawing on Latin America as Zorbitality's locus. In keeping with the Zorbital structure of this thesis, characterised by multiple overlapping genealogies, I refer back to points made in the preface (see pp. 8-9), namely that the Western age of exploration quashed collective ecstasy and colonised women's bodies, through the advent of Western capitalism. I want to use the lineage of Latin American collectivity¹⁷³ as a way of highlighting how we need to re-evaluate female (a)sexualities through transformative movement, whilst seeking the wellbeing of *all* human beings.

The title of Guardiola-Rivera's (2010) book asks a provocative question: '*What if Latin America Ruled the World?*' If this were to occur, he argues, 'the meaning of "rule" would change. For too long that term has been identified with hard power and the ability to use force, more or less unilaterally, to back up one's economic and political interests' (*ibid*: 2-3). The term 'Latin America' can be seen as a Western 'idea' (Mignolo 2005: x-xi).¹⁷⁴ Yet, as a collective identity it holds a sense of Dionysian ecstasy at its heart. This has been forged through its 'collective mobilisation, religious and indigenous traditions, and a long experience with struggles for liberation, tempered by a sense of tragedy and failure' (Guardiola-Rivera 2010: 3). Undoubtedly, equality has not quite been gained in the areas of gender and sexuality in Latin America, with many of its countries subscribing to heteronormative structures (see Chant and Craske 2003) and the violent oppression of women.¹⁷⁵ Yet, I wish to highlight the

¹⁷³ However, this model has local specificities within different Latin American countries.

¹⁷⁴ Mignolo (2005) grounds his work 'in the colonial history that shaped the idea of the Americas' (*ibid*: xi). Thus, he exposes the profoundly Eurocentric nature of Latin America as a term. He encourages us to explore alternative colonial histories, from the perspectives of African and indigenous subjects. I respond to this in Chapter 6, by invoking the Pre-Columbian indigenous and colonial African subjects.

¹⁷⁵ Indeed, seven Latin American countries feature in the top ten list for highest rates of female murder (femicides) in the world (see Yagoub 2016). This may be related to the proliferation of criminal gangs involved in the illegal drugs trade. Recent examples of femicides include the brutal murder and gang-rape of the 16-year-old Argentinean student, Lucia Pérez, which sparked women's protests worldwide (see Wang 2016).

possibilities enabled in Latin America's historical transformation, which highlights the need for a collectivity with local specificities.

Guardiola-Rivera highlights how Amerindians living in the global South and Latinos in the North are offering an alternative model of globalisation, based on movement and transformation: 'They remind us that we are freer than we think, to reinvent and reconstruct,' since they possess a 'newfound consciousness of the relational nature of global space' (Guardiola-Rivera 2010: 4).¹⁷⁶

Furthermore, their model is based on meeting the needs of *all* human beings. Many Latin American countries are achieving this by developing their own socioeconomic systems that are based more on the flows of Amerindian concepts of time and space than neoliberal agendas or Western capitalism.¹⁷⁷ As Guardiola-Rivera (*ibid*: 32) highlights, 'Amerindians built their communities on the basis of forms of exchange that prioritised giving access to common goods and the creation of deep, meaningful connections within wider networks...' Emergent information technologies enable the Amerindian process to a certain extent. Yet, this process also needs to be harnessed through our everyday practices, with the awareness that we also require 'the establishment of true empathy and a worldwide sociality' (*ibid*: 129). Thus, Latin American collectivity offers a resistant imaginary, which is a key driving force for this thesis. Latin America is a rootless concept. It is not oriented one way, since its core is collective and hybrid. This also acts as a powerful metaphor for the rootless movement embodied in the emergent concept of Zorbitality.

Yet, it must also be noted that the Latin American model emerges from a fractured history. As González Echevarría (1997: 6) reminds us: 'The New World was only "new" from the point of view of the Europeans... Native peoples had been telling stories for centuries before Columbus's ships rose above the

¹⁷⁶ For instance, Evo Morales, an indigenous Indian, became president of Bolivia in 2003 (Guardiola-Rivera 2010: 13) and by 2040, it is expected that the US will have a Latino/a majority (*ibid*: 15).

¹⁷⁷ As Guardiola-Rivera (2010: 31) notes, Amerindian concepts of time and space were based around the symbol of the spiral, which symbolised connectivity and the long-term. As I have invoked at various points of this thesis, the line could be said to represent Western capitalism.

horizon that fateful morning of 12 October 1492.' Yet, the indigenous people who survived had to engage in a 'rewriting and constant rediscovery provoked by colonization' (*ibid*: 7). They had to draw on the resources of the West to articulate themselves, even though these devalued their own languages and way of being. What is perhaps most striking about Latin American discovery and conquest narratives: 'is a consciousness of the occurrence of a break in the progression of collective life that announces a new and portentous beginning' (*ibid*: 8). Yet, I wish to highlight that there is possible creativity and resistance within this formulation.

The preceding paragraphs provide an oblique starting point for a discussion of collective biography work with women. Whilst I do not wish to conflate the histories of the indigenous Pre-Columbian subject and the female asexual in the Western world of the twenty-first century, I want to highlight a resonance. As women we are forced to speak of our desires in a coloniser's language, which prizes neat categories, views the heterosexual dyad as the basis of society and devalues the collective in favour of the individual. Yet, there is power in rewriting our stories through a collective spirit that has the wellbeing of the human at its core. Like Pre-Columbian populations, as women we have a shared tradition of storytelling that goes back centuries.¹⁷⁸ Our stories have survived and so has our ability to continually rewrite them anew. In fact, the following chapters will go further than a mere recounting of stories, by suggesting that we can imaginatively rewrite painful memories in terms of a resistant movement. In this process of writing and rewriting, the threefold Zorbital process, from vulnerability to inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion, will emerge.

Due to the time constraints forged by the capitalist economy of London, where my research took place, not enough time was available for my respondents to rewrite their memories. Yet, I view my rewriting of their memories as an essential process in my analysis. As mentioned previously, this imaginative rewriting has powerful resonances with recent traditions in the social sciences

¹⁷⁸ For example: Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1999 [c 1405]) evokes an allegorical city, whose inhabitants are famous women from across time.

(the sociological imagination - Wright Mills 1959; the mnemonic imagination - Keightley and Pickering 2012; utopia as method - Levitas 2013). Each of these methods highlights the intricate connection between history and biography, and the forgotten role of the imagination in memory studies. Commenting on these strands, Keightley and Pickering (2012: 46) assert:

If we seize on them and imaginatively rework them, these short intervals of illumination may cast light forwards and backwards from the event they mark, and allow us to begin linking together other elements whose relation to them had not hitherto been apparent.

This point will be particularly relevant to my reconfiguration of Columbus's conquest of the 'New' World through the resistant movement of the indigenous and African subjects. Whilst I do not want to essentialise the experiences of these subjects, I want to offer one possible vision. This process resonates with Keightley and Pickering's (*ibid*: 52) assertion that imaginative involvement acts 'as a resource for potential transformation.' Whilst this approach is a relatively recent development in the history of Western social sciences, it is important to acknowledge that it has been evident in Latin American literary traditions for centuries.¹⁷⁹ For instance, Alejo Carpentier, drew on his encyclopaedic knowledge of music, literature and architecture to reconfigure Latin American colonial narratives.¹⁸⁰ Thus, in my analysis, I hark back to these traditions.

Chapter 5 foregrounds the first two Zorbital processes: vulnerability to inner ecstasy, by staging peaceful Pre-Columbian voyages to the 'New' World.

Chapter 6 focuses on reaching the third Zorbital process: collective ecstatic motion. It builds to a climax in Martha's memory (section 6.3), which invokes the collective danced rites of West Africa. In the process, it highlights Zorbitality's role as a resistant imaginary, which enables personal transformation and has the good of *all* human beings at its core.

¹⁷⁹ Bahktin's (1941) 'carnavalesque' offers a similar synthesis in the West. Yet, I wish to highlight the longevity of the Latin American tradition.

¹⁸⁰ Carpentier re-imagined the Haitian Revolution in *The Kingdom of This World* (2006 [1949]) and Cortés's conquest of Mexico in *Baroque Concerto* (1991 [1974]). He explored the consequences of Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas in *The Harp And The Shadow* (1992 [1979]).

Chapter 5: Discovering resistant rhythms: From vulnerability to inner ecstasy

Introduction

Margot: I feel like a little burning ball of rage that has no outlet. (Life history interview, 26/05/2015)

*

Scarlett: I wish I could be most gloriously and freely and uninhibitedly crazy. (Diary entry, aged 15, mentioned in life history interview, 23/04/2015)

The above quotes from my respondents highlight that a feminine libidinal economy need not be concerned with sexual orientation or sexuality. Although sexuality allows for more individual preferences than sexual orientation, it is still too focused on a sexual object (Van Anders 2015). As my respondents' words highlight, an alternative feminine libidinal economy is evident in the embodied moments where one feels a sense of joy and a desire for its transformation in specific and contained spaces. Therefore, in the lives of the women I spoke to, Zorbitality was an emergent theme, which needed staging. This staging will be the purpose of the following chapters, which will navigate the threefold Zorbital process, from vulnerability to inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion.

In chapter 5, I focus on the relationship between vulnerability and inner ecstasy, the first two Zorbital processes. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 deal primarily with vulnerability, while sections 5.3 and 5.4 engage with inner ecstasy. In section 5.1, I examine the negative cultural construction of asexuality, drawing on the accounts of three asexual/queer-identified women. Whilst my respondents experienced a sense of inner ecstasy in coming to an asexual identity, in the aftermath others reduced them to static subjects. Yet, through my analysis, I draw on the example of the Zumba song, *Marioneta*, to show how this primary vulnerability may be turned to inner ecstasy through imagining the process of collective movement. Section 5.2 draws on a Latin dance floor scene to show that women are viewed as static subjects not only in abstract language but also in danced moments, where ecstatic movement is inhibited by patriarchal

structures. In section 5.3, I examine how the reoriented erotic poles of Zorbitality, from autoeroticism to polyamory, were evoked as a form of inner ecstasy in my respondents' accounts. Finally, section 5.4 explores how women may reach what I term Zorbitality through transformational moments, where their subjectivities dance in moments of intensity.

Whilst this chapter works through the first two stages of the threefold Zorbital process, I also wish to highlight how these processes overlap. Within Western thought, stages and processes are seen as discrete and causally related (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]). Yet, through my analysis I seek to show that even if one returns to vulnerability after reaching inner ecstasy, possibilities always exist for reaching collective ecstasy, through the internalisation of a collective spirit. After all, even if physical movement is constrained, the imagination is always free to ecstatically move.

Vulnerability

5.1 - Becoming Automaton

Towards the end of the twentieth century, Hall (1991: 44) asserted that contemporary life is characterised by the 'fragmentation and erosion of collective social identity.' This point is becoming even more relevant in the twenty-first century, since we relish the possibilities of performing multiple identities, whilst a sense of collective identification is being eroded. As Weigel (2016: 122) notes, with the insecurity of twenty-first century life, 'we must be mobile.' We must be willing to move if we want to achieve goals in our professional lives. Yet as the political climate in the Western world and beyond is becoming increasingly unstable,¹⁸¹ more and more people are forced to move against their will. Whether our movement is freely chosen or not, the movement of our time is largely that of automatons going through the motions.

How then might we look to an alternative model of collectivity, where collective ecstatic motion is the *basis* of our interactions? This section will begin to answer

¹⁸¹ Examples from 2016 include the knock-on effects of Brexit (Britain's exit from the European Union), the Syrian refugee crisis and the recent election of Donald Trump (a bastion of misogyny, racism and white heterosexual male privilege) as President of the USA.

this question, by drawing on the trajectories of three queer/asexual-identified women, Titania (20), Anna (26) and Kitri (34). I will explore how popular perceptions of asexuality are grounded in stasis, but how a sense of movement was evoked in my respondents' accounts, as they described how they came to asexuality. While each woman initially felt a sense of elation, through negative reinforcement from others – deliberate or not – they felt the burden of their discoveries. Yet, in line with this Zorbital analysis, I will seek to reconfigure my respondents' memories of becoming automatons through subversive movement, by drawing on a *cumbia* song I teach in Zumba classes: *Marioneta* (The Puppet).

A useful starting point for this discussion is to examine how my respondents conceptualised asexuality. Giselle, a 22-year-old tentatively heterosexual-identified respondent, associated it with negativity.

Giselle: I don't fully like the term because it sounds a bit negative. It's something you don't have. (Follow-up interview, 15/05/2015)

Ruth also highlighted how asexuality is seen as a 'negative concept.' Yet, because her sexual identity had 'changed over time,' she could understand how people may relate to asexuality, either as a phase or an orientation. These accounts highlight how being human is somehow equated to being sexual in a genital sense. Yet, as my analysis suggests, a focus on genitality inhibits women's ecstatic movement. In resonance with this point, Titania, an asexual-identified woman, asserted that asexuality is a 'variation on a theme.' She highlighted that there are just as many different versions of asexuality as there are of sexuality. Female (a)sexualities via Zorbitality offer alternative lines of force to the sexual relationship. This addresses the comment of Kali, a 72-year-old woman who had been 'asexual' for most of her life, who said that sexual relationships had always been 'forced' on her. As Kali suggests, the genital sexual relationship acts as a form of colonisation. Indeed, as I described in section 3.3 (see pp. 112-119), the constraint of female ecstatic motion is a direct result of Western colonisation of the 'New' World, which naturalised the heterosexual dyad in dance configurations.

The mismatch between how one's identity is externally *perceived* by others and internally *felt* on a personal level was a particularly strong theme in the workshops.¹⁸² This mismatch acts as a form of colonisation, since the way one *appears* is seen as an indicator of whether one is a sexual being or not. This was reflected in the words of Titania, a 20-year-old asexual-identified woman:

Titania: People don't expect that if you're like confident and outgoing or apparently so, you are not going to be not engaged really in sex. (Follow-up interview, 08/06/2015)

As Titania's quote highlights, the sexualisation of bodies in culture makes 'the asexual' into an object of fetish, whilst asexual identity is rendered even more invisible (see Cerankowski 2014). That is why the reframing of female (a)sexualities through embodied transformation and movement is essential. With this in mind, I will now turn to the experiences of the three asexual-identified women I spoke to, in order to highlight their common experience. They initially reached a sense of inner ecstasy as they arrived at an asexual identity. Yet, they experienced vulnerability in the aftermath of this discovery, as others reduced them to subjects of stasis. Whilst my respondents have found a collective identification in the asexual label, I wish to highlight that they ultimately do their own dances around it.

In the following memory, Titania describes a scene from a family holiday, soon after she had come to the label of asexuality. She narrates her dismay as her initial glow fades. This occurs when her aunt refers to the 'asexual' figure of the late David Bowie and associates it with the image of 'the robot.'

Titania: She was sitting outside one evening with her aunt and her male cousin. It was early evening and she was looking out towards the swimming pool, shaded by the overhang of a pagoda or similar structure. The patio was furnished with cushioned wicker chairs, one of which she was presumably curled up in. Maybe she was reading a book, or on the

¹⁸² I experienced this first-hand, when a male acquaintance asked me: 'Do you think asexuality is pathological?' without realising I had any relationship with it. I told him that I identified tentatively with the term but that I did not find labels helpful. I also asserted that no academic discipline has all the answers to (a)sexuality. He was clearly embarrassed but also suggested that each person should have an orientation *and* should orientate oneself within one academic discipline. His determinism, even after I had demonstrated my vulnerability, showed how rigid thinking is built into Western thought. This situation left me feeling vulnerable and exposed, especially as I had to explain this to a white heterosexual male.

internet. She wasn't involved in the conversation between her aunt and cousin but they were close by and she could hear every word despite the thrum of insects in the drowsy heat.

For some reason, the others were talking about David Bowie. While the exact conversation has long been forgotten, one brief exchange still comes back to her mind occasionally. Her aunt commented that Bowie was an apparently "asexual" figure. Her attention was caught, with some apprehension. She'd been using the word asexual as a personal identifier for perhaps the past 6 months or so. It was still fresh and unfamiliar and this was probably the first time she'd heard the word used by someone else in real life.

Her cousin asked her aunt what it means. "Like a robot," she replied, by way of explanation. A hot flash of emotion brought tears to her eyes. The others had no idea she was even paying attention. She didn't interrupt because she didn't feel confident of acceptance if she explained. She couldn't believe that sex was what her aunt believed made someone human, and it hurt. (Collective biography: session 2, group 1 - memory 3, 03/05/2015)

There are a number of layers to this memory. Firstly, there is the figure of the aunt, who Titania loves and who many people often mistake her for. Yet, in this moment a gulf is created between them: a moment of misrecognition that Titania is not expecting. This relates to the existential gulf that Sartre (1984 [1943: 35] describes, which exists between us and is realised in unexpected moments of discordance. Secondly, the robot is a significant image. It embodies a sense of unreality and motionlessness, as described by Anna (26), another asexual/queer woman, when discussing her professional role as a nurse and the referent stereotypes of the robotic Nurse Ratched¹⁸³ and 'sexy' nun:

Anna: Do I pick a direction? Do I become... this completely desexualised person who ends up being a robot or do I, you know, overtly sexualise myself? (Life history interview, 04/05/2015)

As Anna suggests, the robot is a desexualised figure: someone who lacks life or human capacity. The comments of Titania's aunt also foreground this, evoking the 'reproductive futurism' that Edelman (2004) interrogates. Reproductive futurism refers to Western culture's investment of hope in futurity, embodied in

¹⁸³ Nurse Ratched is a character from Kesey's (2005 [1962]) novel, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. She is a cold and heartless tyrant, who maintains complete control and humiliates patients using her own form of psychotherapy. Yet, at the end of the novel she is rendered powerless, as the patients no longer fear her.

the figure of the child. Titania's aunt evokes a cultural discourse that sees being human as linked to biological reproduction. Since the 'asexual' does not biologically reproduce, s/he is apparently not human. This theme was also reflected in MacInnis and Hodson's (2012) work, which highlighted that asexual-identified individuals are viewed as 'less human' than heterosexual individuals or individuals of other sexual minorities (MacInnis and Hodson 2012: 725). In essence, the asexual is indigenous to all Western sexuality discourses. This is reflected in Anzaldúa's (1999: 40) words: 'The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human.'

When analysed through a Zorbital framework, Titania's memory resonates with Mignolo's (2005) discussion of the difference between discovery and invention in narratives of Latin American history. Whilst invention allows for narratives to be retold, discovery reflects a 'colonization of being,' which 'is nothing else than producing the idea that certain people do not belong in history – that they are non-beings' (*ibid*: 3-4). Like the indigenous Pre-Columbian subject of the 'New' World, the female asexual is rendered indigenous through patriarchal constructions, which constrain her ecstatic movement. As Mignolo (*ibid*: 4) notes, indigenous populations of the 'Americas' had no choice but to adopt the coloniser's language. Likewise, as women of the Western world, we are forced to describe ourselves as 'asexual' if we do not want to have sex, even if this does not capture the sense of movement in our lives. Indeed, what emerges is a figure without a history: the indigenous asexual robot.

Titania does not find herself in the image of the robot, as throughout her interview, she stressed the importance of sexual fluidity in her trajectory. This seems to reflect the discord between stereotypes and deep societal structures that Gilman (1985) describes. Titania also highlighted how many people have sex by just 'going through the motions.' This phrase highlights how sex can actually be robotic, whereas sexual fluidity is always in motion, opening to new horizons. Whilst working within the psychological paradigm, the godfather of asexuality, Anthony Bogaert (2012: 8) also invoked this robotic element in his

deconstruction of the sex act: 'its components can be perceived as "symptoms" suitable to a diagnosis of a mental disorder: obsessive thoughts, odd vocalizations, repetitive movements, and so forth.' Titania's memory demonstrates how static labels have a *real* impact on how we perceive ourselves and thus it is vital that we begin to reconfigure the female 'asexual' as a subject of movement.

Titania chose to stay silent, as if she spoke up, her family may not have understood her case. This resonates with MacNeela and Murphy's (2015) work, which highlighted that asexual-identified individuals may have positive self-perceptions of their identities but choose not to disclose them because of negative societal perceptions. It is interesting however that Titania's initial arrival at 'asexuality' was a positive experience. In a comical scene, she was sitting in a hot tub with like-minded friends, drunk and glowing as she recognised herself in what was being said:

Titania: And sometimes people are like: 'Oh, so how did you hear about asexuality?' and most people are like: 'Oh the internet... tv...' [*in an animated voice*] I was in a hot tub really drunk! [*collective laughter*]... We... always joke, that it was like the most statistically impossible... in a hot tub – a lesbian, a bisexual, and two asexuals!!! In a hot tub! [*laughs loudly*]. In an army camp!!! [*laughs*]. In the middle of a barnyard! [*laughs*]

Me: That's a funny image!

Titania: So, yeah... Like, that was such a positive experience and then for this to be the follow-up was like [*in a comical voice*]: 'Damn: That sucks!' (Collective biography: session 2, group 1, 08/06/2015)

The relationship between Titania's two memories shows that women's libidinal lives are innately grounded in movement. However, when we are faced with static labels we are forced to become automatons. This reminds me of Dunham's remark about pelvic movement in West African dance, which 'becomes erotic on the stages of civilization' (in Lloyd 1949: 245). Yet, within African culture, these movements do not have a sexual basis. In a similar way, the comments of Titania's aunt were part of a cultural discourse that denies ecstatic motion as the *starting point* of women's libidinal economies.

Like Titania, Anna (26) initially was happy having discovered asexuality. She first heard the term during a casual chat with a man, whilst she was head of the LGBT society at University. She realised that she identified with it, and then googled it. Yet, on a train journey to work she found herself the subject of commentary by a group of men, who desexualised her in a way that stripped her of agency. Commenting on her experience, Anna drew on the image of ‘moving’ with reference to her identification, emphasising how these men reduced her to a motionless state. She felt ‘depersonalised.’ She became the robot of Titania’s memory in their gaze. She also felt the sense of ‘loss’ for the motion she had felt prior to that experience.

Anna: ... It was this sensation of just being completely depersonalised, em *[pauses]* and as somebody who’s only just sort of moving into really identifying who she is and kind of owning my own personality and my own identity, to have it so quickly and easily taken away from me was just *[pauses]*... really shocking. I felt kind of sick with the sensation of that loss and I wonder if it was less about what they were saying and more about how I felt in response to it. (Life history interview, 04/05/2015)

The sense of loss in Anna’s response is palpable. It resonates with Butler’s (2004) work, which highlights the link between ecstasy and sexuality. As Butler highlights, when it comes to queer lives, where heteronormative structures make lives less livable, the experience of loss is arguably more acute. Indeed, the opportunity to grieve this loss may not be available. The men reduced Anna’s libidinal ties, with their roots in ecstatic movement, to inhibition. Furthermore, Anna was left with a sense of confusion concerning how she would have confronted them. This resonates with Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) work on objectification theory, which demonstrates how men’s ownership of public space inhibits both women’s bodily movement *and* their ability to act within moments of vulnerability. Therefore, it is vital that we find resistant collective choreographies to deal with such situations.

The journey from initial inner ecstasy to vulnerability was also reflected in the trajectory of Kitri (34), a mother of two, who came to asexuality later in life. She first discovered asexuality when watching a T.V. programme and ‘it felt like a

light bulb moment.' Yet, when an ex-partner tracked her down, she was forced to become an automaton. Her partner signed off the email:

Kitri's partner: 'It's not normal for someone to feel the way that you do.' (Collective biography: session 2, group 1 - memory 3, 03/05/2015)

Like Titania's aunt, Kitri's partner reverts to a cultural discourse that sees having sex as essential and 'normal,' thus referencing Flore's (2014) work on heteronormative structures and their erasure of asexuality as a possible subject position. Furthermore, his comment resonates with Emens's (2014) concept of 'compulsory sexuality,' which refers to 'the pervasive cultural assumption - set into relief by the emergence of asexuality and popular responses to it - that everybody is defined by some kind of sexual attraction' (*ibid*: 306). His response demonstrates clearly that we need to begin thinking beyond static categories when it comes to women's libidinal lives.

The accounts of all three women reflect a reverse Zorbital process.¹⁸⁴ Each woman initially experienced inner ecstasy, before reaching a primary vulnerability. How then might we reconfigure their memories in terms of collective ecstatic motion? Further still, in the words of Giffney (2008: 56): 'What might it mean to queer the Human?' Firstly, we need to develop queer families of our own, which are not necessarily based on biological kinship, but rather on solidarity and common rhythms (see Butler 2000). Secondly, we need to look to alternative worlds, where history is not seen as a linear process and transformation can happen within the moment. We thus need to reassess the concept of 'becoming,' so that it is not viewed as the process by which one transforms into a desexualised non-human other, but rather as 'the sustainable shifts or changes undergone by nomadic subjects in their active resistance against being subsumed in the commodification of their own diversity' (Braidotti 2006: 137). Since Latin America is the locus for the emergent concept of Zorbitality, I will here draw on the example of *Marioneta*, a cumbia song I teach in Zumba classes, to foreground this alternative model of becoming.

¹⁸⁴ See Zorbital Flow 4 (pp. 270-271), for a visual representation of this.

Marioneta is a song about a puppet. One could view those who dance to its rhythms as automatons. Yet, my Zumba ‘puppets’ dance ecstatically, their hips undulating and their arms swerving. We look like puppets having our strings pulled. Yet, we smile and move in synchrony, without being reduced to stasis. The song builds to a crescendo, as the music becomes faster and faster. We all move our hips, whilst our arms move in, out and up in a rhythmic motion. We are like puppets possessed. Yet, as the music ends, we always smile with glee, full of collective ecstasy. We are happy we have reached the end, through our shared energy. This is the same energy that my respondents felt when they initially came to asexuality. The automaton, reconfigured through *Marioneta*, shows how they might respond in future situations. They would move conceptually to other terrain that takes movement as the basis of their libidinal lives. Furthermore, they would physically experience the powerful movement of the asexual collective whilst rewriting it with their own movement rules, thus answering Barker’s (2013) call. In order to support one another, we must begin to view asexuality not as a motionless state, which equates the ‘asexual’ to the robot, but rather as a dancing process, which actually connects us through our common human traits. This aim also echoes the Latin American model of collectivity, as described in the introduction to Part III (see pp. 179-182).

In the next section, I will examine Katherine’s Latin dance floor scene, which highlights a sense of primary vulnerability. Yet, I will seek to reconfigure it through alternative collective movement rites, situated in queer dance floor spaces (Rivera-Servera 2004) and Mexican *conchero* dance (Rostas 1996). Whilst in section 5.1, I highlighted how asexual-identified women are reduced to figures of stasis, in section 5.2 I will highlight how women’s ecstatic movement is inhibited in *everyday spaces*, regardless of sexual orientation.

5.2 - Murder on the dance floor

As Aparicio (1998) attests, Latin social dances, with their dyadic formations and leader/follower roles, can be seen as dances of seduction. As mentioned in Chapter 3.3 (see pp. 114-117), Latin dance forms have their roots in the fusion of African dance, which was primarily solo ecstatic dance within a collective,

and European couple dance. Yet, as I discussed, the suppression of collective ecstasy was at the heart of Western colonisation of the 'New' World, (Ehrenreich 2007), which also resulted in the emergence of the capitalist system (Guardiola-Rivera 2010). This continued the suppression of Dionysus, the asexual mythological God of collective ecstasy, in the Western tradition. As I have highlighted elsewhere in this thesis, notably in my own trajectory in Chapter 4, the *dyadic* configuration of Latin dances can be constraining, for it creates a stratified series of gender expectations.¹⁸⁵ The patriarchal politics of Latin dance floors also emerged in the memory of Katherine, a 30-year-old Brazilian woman, who has lived in the UK for 14 years. It is worth noting the context of Brazilian sexuality, as well as some reference points in Katherine's biography, before analysing this memory.

As Parker's (2009) work highlights, two dichotomous images of sexuality reign supreme in Latin America: repression (the Catholic Church) and eroticism/sensuality (*Carnaval*). Furthermore, in the specific context of Brazil, sexuality has become 'a cultural framework for the self-interpretation of Brazilian society in which history and myth merge' (*ibid*: 23). As Parker's empirical work highlights, the image of men consuming women's bodies is common in discussions of sexuality in Brazil. Yet, in contrast, *Carnaval* embodies the erotic merging of different bodies, providing 'a time and place where complete freedom is possible' (*ibid*: 157). Indeed, the duality of these perspectives, spanning from misogyny to open sensuality, serves to inhibit both women's physical movement and the development of alternative subjectivities.

Aged 16, Katherine came to the UK to live with her grandmother, following her parents' divorce and her mother's illness. She saw her exile as an escape, which she also felt guilty about. When she was 24, Katherine went back to visit her family in Brazil and asserted that:

Katherine: It was a shock for me to think that people had the licence to touch you without invitation. (Collective biography: session 2, group 2, 02/06/2015)

¹⁸⁵ See autobiographical passages 7 (pp. 167-169) and 9 (pp. 174-177).

Yet, she also highlighted how 'you are always vulnerable' when unwillingly touched. These two points are reflected in the following memory, which was experienced in the South of Spain. This setting is fitting, as Columbus sailed from Cádiz, a fortified city in Andalucía, on his second and fourth voyages to the 'New' World. Perhaps then the male perpetrator of this memory can be seen as an embodiment of the Western coloniser. Katherine's memory highlights the politics of Latin dance floors, which caused her to resort to violence to get her point across.

"No me digas que no" – don't tell me no...

Katherine: She was on holidays visiting a friend in southern Spain. One evening in high spirits, she, her friend and four other women she met and bonded with went out dancing. At the venue, they were happy, having spent the day on the beach, laughing with each other, noticing similar quirks, stories and dreams. Their arrival at the bar provoked a comment from a man, which was something like: 'what a pack of whores/sluts.'

The group was formed of outspoken, exuberant women no doubt, and the Latin men are only too quick to categorize. They were too much in their bubble to engage, so they moved on, unimpressed but unharmed, by the idiot.

Later on... while she was dancing, a man approached her. She carried on dancing. He was a bit persistent and she has a short fuse for Latin men's attitudes to women in general. Their sexism is very much ingrained in their culture and the codes of courtship are not in accord with what she likes. She moved away, saying 'no' to his invitation to get closer. When he persisted, she left the dance floor, thinking there was no point fighting this battle on the dance floor of a regular club, where heteronormativity of a Latin type reigns. She doesn't belong there and one mustn't fight every single fight, especially on enemy territory.

She was having some water leaning on the counter of the bar when unexpectedly this creature simply decides to embrace her from behind and whisper (argh!) in her ear: "*no me digas que no*" (don't tell me no...)

She is enraged to this day, recounting the episode in which some greasy dude, already rejected politely, takes upon himself to "seduce" her with an unwelcome physical contact that violates her will.

He was therefore given the only treatment available at such times, violence. She wholeheartedly elbowed his stomach and pulled whatever hair she could find. People pulled him away and she got her friends and they left... (Collective biography: session 2, group 2 - memory 3, 02/06/2015)

As Gotfrit (1988) highlights, women's collective dancing can actually disrupt male dominance. Yet, Katherine's account conjures up the image of 'murder on the dance floor,' evoked through the 'enemy territory' of a club, where 'heteronormativity of a Latin type reigns.' This is a battle waged between woman and man, where the woman's space is commonly invaded, her ecstatic motion thwarted, and her only option to resort to violence. At the start of the memory, Katherine enters the bar with a group of 'outspoken, exuberant women.' This turn of phrase expresses a sense of vitality. The man's comment to the effect that they are 'sluts' immediately challenges this. Yet, the women are 'too much in their bubble' to pay any attention to him. This shows how as a collective they have established their own mental and physical space. Yet, when the women enter the dance floor, and Katherine is engaged in her presumably solo dance within a collective, the man approaches her and tries to invade her space. She ignores him and evokes the image of having a 'short fuse' for Latin men's attitudes to women, to convey her fury. Katherine's account is highly essentialist at this point, although she is understandably angry. In the next part of the memory, her response is to move away from the man. She asserts her space, although her ecstatic motion is stopped in its tracks. Yet, she leaves the dance floor when she realises that this is a battle not worth fighting. Then comes the second space invasion: the man touches her without her consent, even as she holds on to perhaps the only concrete object she has at this point - the bar. The only option Katherine has, since her ecstatic motion has already been thwarted, is to resort to physical violence. This is perhaps the nearest she can get to ecstatic motion in that moment.

Katherine remarks that 'Latin men are only too quick to categorise.' It is important to critique the essentialism of this comment. What Katherine is referring to here is *machismo*, which Melhuus and Stølen (1996: 4) describe as the notion of 'a hegemonic Latin American male,' who controls women and takes pride in his virility. Yet, as the authors highlight, this term is in need of deconstruction. As Cubitt (1995) theorises, *machismo* is a repeated performance of the coloniser's penetration of the Amerindian woman's body, which goes hand in hand with *marianismo* (see Stevens 1973) as the veneration

of an idealized motherhood.¹⁸⁶ This is reflected in Stavans's (1998: 228-9) assertion that:

A violent eroticism was a fundamental element in the colonisation of the Hispanic world, from Machu Picchu to Chichén Itzá and Uxmal. The primal scene of the clash with the Spaniards is a still-unhealed rape: the phallus, as well as gunpowder, was a crucial weapon used to subdue. *Machismo* as a cultural style endlessly rehearses this humiliating episode in the history of the Americas, imitating the violent swagger of the Spanish conquerors.

Stavans's hypothesis is an interesting one, although Chant and Craske (2003: 15) assert that the conquered Aztecs were also warring people, and men ruled supreme. Regardless of the origins of *machismo*, I do not wish to deny it as a phenomenon that affects women's lives. However, as Melhuus and Stølen's (1996) edited volume highlights, *machismo* has many faces. It has local differences within various Latin American countries. Furthermore, it should not be viewed as a single force that characterises *all* Latino men's engagements with women (see Krohn-Hansen 1996; Nencel 1996; Prieur 1996). In order to move this analysis forward, and to offer ways of subverting Katherine's scene through ecstatic movement, I will now draw on the liberating space of queer dance floors (Rivera-Servera 2004) and Mexican *conchero* dance (Rostas 1996), connecting them with Zumba as a central example of Zorbitality. Such an endeavour resonates with Keightley and Pickering's (2012) work on the mnemonic imagination, which suggests that: 'Experience that has long since been enacted, can, via remembering, be interwoven with playful imaginings of what might have been or what is still to come' (Keightley and Pickering 2012: 51). The following analysis shows how women can discover resistant rhythms, thus turning a primary vulnerability into vital inner ecstasy. This is achieved by imagining collective movement practices, which act as resistant imaginaries.¹⁸⁷

In his work on Latino/a queer dance, Rivera-Servera (2004) conveys the 'utopian potential' of Latin queer dance club spaces. As he (*ibid*: 274-275)

¹⁸⁶ In Kristeva's (1981) *Women's Time*, the ideal mother represents the idealization of a relationship to an archaic mother. Furthermore, in *Stabat Mater* (1985), the maternal is an 'ambivalent principle' (*ibid*: 134) and a 'seesaw' (*ibid*: 148). As Söderbäck (2010: 5) argues, Christianity has frozen the seesaw. Mary has become motherhood 'cemented in a frozen image.'

¹⁸⁷ This can be described as a partial Zorbital process. See Zorbital Flow 2 (pp. 268-269).

highlights: 'Dancing in the club produces queer *latinidad* as a utopian performative that is at once the articulation of something new, an identity in motion that bridges both queerness and *latinidad*, as well as an intervention in the histories and struggles of these identities.' Thus, although the club itself offers 'an economy of hierarchies' (*ibid*: 271), the sense of communal identity invoked in queer performativity challenges this 'at the site of the local' (*ibid*: 282). In a moment, I will connect this to Katherine's scene, but firstly there are a number of aspects of Rivera-Servera's work, which I seek to unpack. Firstly, his focus on utopia goes against the grain of Zorbitality. His theory creates resistance for Latin and queer identities within the club space itself. Yet, there is a need to integrate this into a politics of the everyday, where collective ecstasy propels social transformation, and differences in identity are forgotten. Secondly, Rivera-Servera highlights how the club space creates 'movement ideologies' (*ibid*: 271), which inhibit personal movement. Yet, as Zumba shows, holding common movement configurations is part of the joy, since these do not inhibit *personal* styles of movement. Furthermore, these movements can be seen as motifs of resistance, as they are practiced in a space somewhere between the gym and the dance floor: the transnational gym (Kabir 2015a, 2015b). This space, together with Zumba's decoupled Latin social dance, offers alternative possibilities for being. Returning to Katherine's memory, perhaps what the male protagonist was most afraid of was a group of 'exuberant' women, dancing for themselves. I therefore assert that the best challenge to him would be for the women to burst into a lively merengue routine, with Katherine leading the way. The common moves would hold them, whilst the man would stand motionless. However, perhaps he may want to join in. Furthermore, I would hope that Katherine would internalise the spirit of her collective and draw on it in any future situations of vulnerability.

A second reconfiguration of Katherine's memory can be achieved by drawing on Mexican *conchero* dance, which Rostas's (1996) work explores. In this tradition, men and women revive indigenous Aztec culture,¹⁸⁸ whilst working towards a

¹⁸⁸ The Aztecs were a Pre-Columbian population who lived in what is now Mexico from approximately 1200-1500 AD.

more ethical dance configuration, where individual bodies are celebrated within a collective. In the dance, the *concheros* explore their understanding of 'Indianness' (*ibid*: 208), which refers to notions about Indianness. As Rostas describes, *conchero* dance draws on Catholic imagery (the Virgin of Guadalupe),¹⁸⁹ as well as ambiguous symbols related to Western colonisation of Mexico (embodied in the figure of *La Malinche*).¹⁹⁰ Yet, the *concheros* argue that 'the dance is about the reconquest of Mexico for the Mexicans' (*ibid*). The dance itself features the *saumadora*, a woman who tends the incense burner and joins the male leader in the centre. Yet, they attempt to maintain a gender balance, 'if only in the first instance, for the duration of the dance' (*ibid*: 209). *Conchero* dance is performed in a circle at a chosen site, which both has Catholic significance and a connection with the ancient Aztecs. In the dance, men and women take alternate spaces in the circle and dance equal steps. Some see *conchero* dance as a Catholic tradition and others see it as a return to Aztec rites. Yet, these viewpoints peacefully coexist, as people of different classes, ages and professions come together. Equally, as Rostas (*ibid*: 221) asserts, 'the dancers never touch but aim to move in harmony.' This counters the clear invasion of Katherine's space in her memory. Each person takes responsibility within the circle, and 'thus for the duration of the dance, as a transcendent state is slowly reached, the gender inequalities or differences of everyday life are erased' (*ibid*: 222).¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ The 'Virgin' is a static image of femininity that connects Western and Latin American traditions via the history of European conquest of the 'New' World. As Anzaldúa (1999: 51) notes, the Virgin of Guadalupe reflects a transformation of the Aztec serpent goddess, Coatlicue, who I mentioned in the introduction to my me-search (see p. 139 of this thesis). The Spanish colonisers desexed Coatlicue through Catholicism. As Anzaldúa (*ibid*) notes, by 1660, Guadalupe had become synonymous with the Virgin Mary in the Western tradition. Guadalupe is valued within Mexico, as she represents both the conqueror and the conquered in one, and mediates between the human and the divine. She offers hope that 'the Indian, despite extreme despair, suffering and near genocide, has survived.' (*ibid*: 52)

¹⁹⁰ As Rostas (1996) notes, the notion of *mestizaje* (mixed Spanish and indigenous identities) was central to the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Men were at the top of the hierarchy, and they created the image of *La Malinche*. She was the indigenous woman who was given as an object of exchange to Hernán Cortés, the coloniser of Mexico. She was initially viewed in a positive light, yet later as a betrayer of the Aztecs. Yet, as Anzaldúa (1999: 44) reminds us: 'The worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer.' Indeed, she has resisted the Spaniards, the Anglos (who forcefully moved her back to the borderland states of the US), and Mesoamerican patriarchs.

¹⁹¹ As Anzaldúa (1999: 54) notes, a balance between the sexes was evident in early Aztec culture. However, this changed following the Aztecs' mythical voyage from Aztlán around 820 AD. Here the Aztecs joined with the Mexica tribe near Tula. The Mexicas had one religion and

Returning to Katherine's memory, what strikes me about the dance floor is its boxed confines. The circle of *conchero* dance enables the possibility of a more ethical relationship between the sexes. Ultimately, as Rostas (*ibid*: 221) notes, it is the *saumadora*, the woman at the centre of the circle, who balances this relationship and helps 'the group to transcend.' What we therefore need for the future is for men and women to work together to reshape the dance floor, preferably in a circular formation, where space and boundaries are respected.¹⁹² If this were to occur, the scene Katherine narrated would never have happened. Yet, her memory highlights how vital it is at this juncture to create safe spaces for *all* human beings. She highlights how patriarchal spaces inhibit ecstatic female movement and demonstrates the need for new movement configurations that enable sustainable futures. Having examined Katherine's Latin dance floor scene and having sought to reconfigure it through alternative spaces and practices, I will now explore how women may gain ownership of their libidinal economies. Indeed, as I will highlight, the two erotic poles of Zorbitality - autoeroticism and polyamory - were evoked in my respondents' accounts. Yet, these poles may shift across women's lives. An awareness of this transformation is central to the second Zorbital process, inner ecstasy, which is the basis of this section.

Inner ecstasy

5.3 - Zorbitality's erotic poles: From autoeroticism to polyamory

One's body - one's temple: Female Autoeroticism

In this section I will examine women's embodied accounts of the autoerotic process. To reiterate, autoeroticism refers to gaining sexual pleasure from one's own body (see Ellis 1913 [1897]).¹⁹³ As Dodson (1974: 3) highlights, autoeroticism is our 'primary form of sexual expression.' Yet, in resonance with Irigaray's (1985 [1977]) work, a number of women in the collective biography

administrative centre. They also had a warring God and a tyrannical leader, *Itzcoatl*. *La Malinche*, as Anzaldúa asserts, did not cause the fall of the Aztec nation. Rather, it was a result of the rise of a patriarchal warring order, where a balance between the sexes was disrupted. See Rostas's (1996) comparison of contemporary *conchero* and *Mexica* dance, which recalls this genealogy.

¹⁹² Occasionally drum circles occur spontaneously in dance floor spaces. However, I wish that this would be the starting configuration.

¹⁹³ For a genealogy of autoeroticism, see pp. 75-80 of this thesis.

groups asserted that they had never been allowed to think of autoeroticism as a libidinal economy in its *own* right, due to the restrictions of phallogocentric regimes. Johanna (47) admitted that she had never been taught about sexual pleasure when she was growing up and only later read about the clitoris. At the time she could not understand why everybody made such a fuss about sex.

Johanna: I was unhappy. There wasn't any fun or any pleasure and I thought: 'Why the hell does everyone want sex?!' (Collective biography: session 2, group 1, 03/05/2015)

As Johanna's quote implies, the pleasure that one is supposed to derive from partnered sexual relationships does not always match up to one's lived experiences. Thus, this section will highlight how autoeroticism allows women the space to experience embodied pleasure (see Cixous 1976 [1975]), through the process of climax and flow.

Deleuze and Guattari (2004) [1980] argue that viewing orgasm as a sexual climax has limited liberatory potential, since life itself is a flow of intensities.¹⁹⁴ Yet, I would critique Deleuze and Guattari on the basis that humans seek specific moments of embodied pleasure. Jagose (2013), meanwhile, views orgasm as liberatory and progressive, especially in the twenty-first century, where reproductive sex plays a less prominent role than in previous centuries. However, I would argue that the liberatory potential of orgasm comes when integrated into a broader activity that ensures flow in one's life (see Csikszentmihalyi 1992). This sense of flow is achieved when one directs one's energy to a goal, achieves something unexpected, finds a sense of deep connection with other people and surpasses the limitations of the self. Thus, in my own life, the pleasurable orgasm I experience in my autoerotic endeavours keeps echoing in my life through the Dionysian flow of Zumba.

This sense of orgasm and flow was echoed in Katherine's memory. She recalled a eureka moment in her teenage years, when she accidentally reached orgasm in the shower. This memory came to her mind straight away when she thought

¹⁹⁴ See pp. 121-123 of this thesis for a discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) conception of orgasm.

about a moment of *complete* freedom within her body. Nobody had told her about autoeroticism or what way it should be. She discovered it *for herself*. This resonates with Braidotti's (2006) theory of nomadic subjectivity, where desire is not a given but is rather a process of moving forward to a horizon of possible becoming. As Braidotti (*ibid*: 197) notes: 'Desire sketches the conditions for the future by bringing into focus the present, through the unavoidable accident of the encounter, a flush, a sudden acceleration that mark a point of non-return.' Katherine's memory takes place in the shower, with running water, which I have also recently found to be the perfect setting for this activity. The water is soothing and intensifies the experience, providing a moment of great intimacy, where one does not feel alone.

Katherine: On that day she was in the shower, her favourite place because it allowed her privacy, for she didn't have her own room, she had a brother. So her time in the bathroom was sacred and cherished. With the pressure of the water coming from the hose, she washed all of her self. As long as she can remember the warmth of water and steam are her chosen companion when in distress, when joyful, when bored, when confused, when sensual.

Water and solitude combined give her a sensation of being hugged. There is silence, there is nakedness and there is cleansing that goes beyond the dust and sweat; there is the steam that enters her body and the liquid that caresses over her, relentlessly.

Bodies of water are symbolic for good reasons, to be immersed, to be overflowed, to be washed away, to drown, to be wet, all that is felt inside and outside.

At that time it provided her with a sort of tingle that was bordering on the threshold of pain, which would eventually bring upon her a sensation of near death, or so she thought. It was an unexpected brightness within herself that left her fearful of dying, passing out, not being able to withhold, not making sense of it, not knowing that this was a climax and that this feeling would subside. She felt as if it would continue increasing indefinitely and what may happen then?

This had shown her what her body was capable of, how great it was to exist and then joy doubled once she figured that one was able to repeat this "inner blinding light" at will, and that she could melt all of her over and over again, just by being alone with her body.

She was one within herself, boundless.
Which evokes in her a feeling of freedom.

Of transcendental joy, and for this trip all she needs is herself, for her body is her.

She is this body that feels wonderful things. (Collective biography: session 2, group 2 - memory 4, 02/06/2015)

As Katherine's memory demonstrates, the build-up to orgasm provides a transcendental experience. She has carved off a space for herself, the bathroom, which is 'sacred and cherished.' She sees the water as her 'chosen companion,' a lover of sorts that always gives her the 'sensation of being hugged.' Just like a good friend, she can turn to water and solitude, whatever mood she is in. It is a 'cleansing' experience. She chooses what will enter her body (the steam) and what will caress her (the water). It is also a symbolic process, which evokes Amerindian concepts of time and space, characterised by circular rather than linear processes, and a deep connection with nature (see Guardiola-Rivera 2010). Indeed, Katherine's washing ceremony makes her think of 'all that is felt inside and outside.' Her process evokes a sense of rebirth. The symbolism implies a giving birth to previously unknown pleasures, emanating from her body. Furthermore, Katherine achieves this through the flow of her writing, which evokes Cixous's (1976 [1975]) *l'écriture féminine*, as an embodied writing practice. Furthermore, Katherine's richly textured memory addresses Brown et al.'s (2011) hope that future research on embodiment will explore the *intricacies* of lived experience, rather than relying on totalising frameworks of analysis.

Whilst initially, having reached orgasm, Katherine feels 'a sensation of near death,' the 'inner blinding light' that emerges is truly life-affirming. At the time, the experience felt like a climax that was almost too much. She felt confused and disoriented. 'She felt as if it would continue increasing indefinitely and what may happen then?' Yet, as she entered back into the flow of life, she realised how pleasurable the experience had been, and that her joy could be 'doubled' at any time in the future. All she needed was her body. Katherine's vision is truly Dionysian, evoking Vidal's (1966) work, which highlighted the ecstatic element of masturbation. Katherine's memory shows how women's bodies can be their own sanctuaries, sources of pleasure and agency. This is a pleasure that can be

continuously replicated, as a distinctive feminine libidinal economy, defying the static replications of high capitalism, which commodify female desire (Hennessy 2000).

Whilst Katherine questioned the bodily freedom of her memory when her friend asserted that she obtained freedom through 'dancing,' her memory actually shows how the autoerotic process is itself a dance of agency. When reading Katherine's memory, I was reminded of Dodson's (1974: 96) words: 'Building up, counting down, and dancing on the edge for as long as possible, I use every body movement, breathing pattern, and erotic thought in my repertoire. It's a total commitment to hedonism.' Female autoeroticism can therefore be seen as a moving process, where others may be imagined, yet where we do our own dance. Katherine's memory holds considerable value for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, since it shows how autoeroticism replicates joy at the level of the *human*. Whilst it suggests the value of reclaiming autoeroticism as an important aspect of female (a)sexualities, Katherine's memory also demonstrates its role as a universal rite. She thus affirms Žižek's (2008) view that autoeroticism is *inclusive of all*, since: 'the very dimension of otherness is cancelled, one does it with oneself.' Autoeroticism offers a transformative imaginary, where one celebrates one's own body within a moment, whilst going back into the flow of everyday life.

Katherine's memory provoked a strong reaction from others in the group. Isadora (50) felt angry that she had become sexual with other people before she had fully come to experience her body's pleasure *for itself*. She also felt angry that it took her husband, when she was 28, to tell her that she should touch her own body and experience its pleasures.

Isadora: ... And listening... to em Katherine, I sort of like had a sadness that I was sexually active before I was ready in a way, and I sort of felt like I missed out on my own body and I was... thrown into a world of em, having sexual relationships that were... me just really wanting somebody to be with...

Me: But I think in so many women's trajectories it's like that. I don't know, sometimes female masturbation is seen as this taboo topic.

Isadora: [*in an elevated voice*] I didn't even know about it for years and then by the time... I think actually my husband introduced me to it. He said: 'Touch yourself, you know.' And I was like [*in an awkward voice*]: 'Can I?... Of course you can: it's your body!!!' (Follow-up interview, 02/06/2015)

Isadora's sense of loss at not having had the time and space to fully explore her own body is palpable. Her experience contrasts with Katherine's sense of ecstasy. In a Zorbital analysis, which draws on colonial history as a backdrop, Katherine could be said to have engaged in a peaceful voyage of discovery, whilst Isadora was forced to internalise a coloniser's discourse. The stasis of the dyad is implied in Isadora's words. This restricts the possibility of autoeroticism and polyamory as dual centralising forces for a feminine libidinal economy, which this thesis seeks to address.

In the next section, I will turn to polyamory as the second erotic pole of Zorbitality, drawing on the accounts of Scarlett and Laverne, as examples that challenge the dominance of monogamy. Scarlett's life trajectory and relational style embody movement. Meanwhile, Laverne, who is in a heterosexual partnership, shows how we may begin to 'queer heterosexuality,' in Schlichter's (2004: 544) words, in a way that is more inclusive of all people. I will finally draw on Martha's dancing memory to show how autoeroticism and polyamory may be brought together as part of a distinctive feminine libidinal economy, articulated through movement.

Polyamory: An ethical openness to all

Polyamory is often described as engaging in multiple sexual and/or romantic relationships with others (Aguilar 2013). Yet, in recent times, the intersection between asexuality and polyamory has begun to be explored (see Scherrer 2010). Nevertheless, as Scherrer (*ibid*: 159) highlights, most studies 'have expended relatively little attention to those relationships that do not explicitly involve sex.' This thesis addresses Scherrer's concern, yet goes further by articulating polyamory as one of Zorbitality's erotic poles, which can shift throughout the life course. The following section highlights the power of having deep affective investments with multiple others. I wish to highlight that

women's experiences of polyamory embody inner ecstasy, which is experienced through a realisation that movement is the *starting point* for their libidinal economies. Thus, it addresses the points I raised in Titania's memory in section 5.1 (see pp. 186-189) and Katherine's in section 5.2 (pp. 192-199). This is namely that vulnerability is created through static labels that inhibit transformation, which is carried through into everyday spaces where women's physical movement is constrained. As described in section 3.3 (see pp. 112-119), this relationship has a deep connection with European conquest of the 'New' World, which created a system of exchange that naturalised the dyad on the dance floor. This colonisation resonates with twenty-first century life, which views polyamory with suspicion and primarily heterosexual monogamous partnerships as the norm (Wilkinson 2010). Yet, if placed within Amerindian models of collectivity, which value 'the creation of deep, meaningful connections within wider networks...' (Guardiola-Rivera 2010: 32), we could create a more sustainable future for *all* humans. I will carry this point into the following analysis.

The trajectory of Scarlett (61), who describes herself as 'polyamorous, but not always in a sexual dimension,' is testament to what I term Zorbitality. She has travelled the world and has worked in diverse professions, from being a medical herbalist to working in a prison, albeit never for too long! Throughout her life, Scarlett has followed signs, rather than societal expectations. Two signs which appeared to her in her younger life were: 'I'm never going to get married' and 'Women are going to be incredibly important to me one day.' Yet, for many years, she had the freedom of not having to associate these terms with a sexual orientation label. At the age of 23, having been in a relationship with a man for five years, Scarlett came to lesbianism. In a comic scene, the reality dawned on her as she stood at a bus shelter waiting for a lift to work, and shouted to herself: 'I'm a lesbian!' She then spent the whole day drafting a letter to her family, telling them the news and waiting for a bomb to drop.

Scarlett saw heterosexuality as a game with rules and part of the reason why she chose lesbianism was because there were no rules. Scarlett's account

connects with Barker's (2013) work, which shows how we can rewrite rules in our intimate relationships, especially by playing with the rules of non-monogamous partnerships. Scarlett defied patriarchal rule within her life and chose to go her own path, regardless of what her father thought.

Scarlett: I mean... when I first came out as a lesbian, one of his tritest moments was that I was going to end up as an embittered lonely old woman.

Me: [*audible gasp*]

Scarlett: [*laughs hysterically*] And I just looked at him and said [*in a solemn voice*]: 'Well, you don't know that! And anyway you'll be dead by the time it comes!' (Life history interview, 23/04/2015)

As Scarlett highlights, stereotypes surrounding female (a)sexualities inhibit transformation. The ones invoked here are the frigid woman and the spinster, which I have previously explored in chapter 2.3 (see pp. 84-88). In order for alternative libidinal economies to be offered, based on our own rules, we need to realise that we have the power to let our subjectivities wander whatever way we want. It was not just Scarlett's words but the way she said them that highlighted her freedom. She really did laugh hysterically. It made me think that if she had gone to see Freud in the nineteenth century, he would have labelled her a female 'hysteric' and would have offered her talking therapy. The figure of Freud is invoked here through the figure of her father. Yet, Scarlett is very aware of the power of her own movement. This has considerable importance for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, since it shows how vulnerability can be turned to inner ecstasy in a moment of experimentation, where we openly challenge and then dance around the patriarchal rule that constrains us.

Scarlett's starting point for her own libidinal economy is her rejection of monogamy. Similar to my account, she sees it as a deeply unequal relationship, based on 'ownership.' As Anapol's (2010) work highlights, polyamorous relationships create their own logic and rules, since negotiations amongst webs of people become a defining feature. This is reflected in Scarlett's account, since

she *owns* her polyamory as a relational style, rather than solely defying her father's command.

Scarlett: You know, he thought I was a complete libertine [*laughs*] but actually I was just being polyamorous! [*laughs*] (Life history interview, 23/04/2015)

This point highlights how resistant movement can be a centralising force for female (a)sexualities, which is significant for this thesis.

Initially, I viewed Scarlett's stripping away of agency from asexuality as problematic. She saw it as 'impossible' to be 'asexual' in a sexualised world. Yet, then I realised that the fixity of 'asexuality' is precisely the problem. Scarlett's account highlighted the possibility of 'sexuality as fluidity' when looking beyond the 'asexual' label, to a polyamorous relational context. This is reflected in Scarlett's current libidinal economy, as she likes the idea of caring for an older woman, possibly with a sexual dimension. Scarlett's account shows the multiple possibilities of female (a)sexualities, when viewed within a polyamorous relational context. Yet, as I will now argue, drawing on the account of Laverne, a heterosexual woman, we can all be more polyamorous in the way we deal with others, as *love* is the core of all human relationships.

Laverne, a 21-year-old Christian, is going through a period where she is not enjoying sex, and has chosen not to have sex with her boyfriend as a source of bodily agency. However, she calls this 'voluntary celibacy' rather than 'asexuality' and acknowledges that she may want to have sex again. Laverne sees her abstinence as being partially linked to her Christian faith but also as something that has evolved organically, without any conscious thought. It could be seen as a process of solo improvisation, in dance terms.

Laverne: For a long time when I've been with my partner... [*pauses*] like, when he touches me I just don't feel like being touched, and he's noticed that for a while... he's not coercing me to have sex with him at all but I physically do not want to have sex. And I have to sometimes remind myself: 'Laverne, you don't have to have sex just because he wants you to have sex. If you don't feel like doing it, you don't have to'... Because you know, if you're in a relationship... it comes with a package... This is what couples do and if you don't you're not 'normal.' And... right now I'm like, I don't want to have sex... I haven't had sex in like over a month

now... I wasn't actively thinking I wasn't going to have sex. I just didn't feel like it... I feel really liberated. I feel really happy... I always thought if I was sexless I'd be fucking misery. I'd be really miserable. But I'm not! (Life history interview, 18/05/2015)

Laverne's account challenges the commercial capitalist package of 'the romantic relationship' in the twenty-first century, which comes with a set of expectations: namely that one has sex and buys into a commercial dating culture (Weigel 2016). She also challenges a pathologising discourse of being sexually 'normal.' Furthermore, Laverne's account highlights the enduring role of love in human relationships and the fact that relationships can have intimacy without sexual intimacy (see Scherrer 2008). Her account naturally deconstructs the expectations of heterosexuality, and thus she evokes 'queer heterosexuality,' which Schlichter (2004: 545) defines as 'the de- and possible reconstruction of heterosexual subjectivity through the straight authors' aspiration to identify as queer.' Yet, the beauty of Laverne's account is that she does not have to label herself as such. Rather, she is experimenting within a moment.

Laverne's account brings into relief the romance narrative of capitalist culture, which is largely displaced from love as a sense of deep connection with others in our webs of relationships. Laverne's account thus resonates with the Latin American model of collectivity I have drawn on throughout this thesis, which values a network of connections (see Guardiola-Rivera 2010). Laverne's account resonates with the Zorbital process, as she reaches a sense of inner ecstasy through an awareness of her autonomy. Whilst she does not explicitly mention a broader collectivity, it is implied in her deconstruction of the dyad. Her approach resonates with that of the radical feminist, Zita May Brown (1976: 198), who contended that: 'Love is the enemy of unequal social structure. When people really love they become disobedient. And by love I don't just mean sex because that's a tiny fraction of the love we are capable of.' Both Scarlett's and Laverne's accounts are significant for a rethinking of female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, as they highlight that an expansive love challenges the coloniser's discourse of ownership and stasis. I will carry these thoughts into this final section, where I will show how autoeroticism and polyamory coexist in movement, by drawing on the dancing memory of Martha (34).

Linking autoeroticism and polyamory

In her talk at the First Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies Conference in Lisbon (September 2015), Mercedes Pöll asked the following question: 'What is sex?' It has haunted me ever since, as I realise how deeply I had internalised the view that I had not had 'sex' (i.e. – penetrative sex with a man) and that therefore I must be a 'virgin.' Yet, I do not want to be posited as virginal, as I agree with Irigaray (1985 [1977]: 211) when she states: '*Between us*, there's no rupture between virginal and nonvirginal. No event that makes us women. Long before your birth, you touched yourself, innocently.' Having reassessed the situation, I view the term 'virginity' as a social construction that is extremely damaging for both female and male subjectivities. Firstly, it assumes that in order to be seen as fully adult or mature, you have to be marked by another human being. Secondly, this term has heterosexist undertones. For women, it presumes that they need to be penetrated by men and for men it assumes that they need to penetrate women. Thirdly, it takes little account of individuals who experience autoeroticism or polyamory as central to their sexualities.

Undoubtedly, virginity is a Western label. Other non-Western traditions, such as tantra, which decentre the dyad in sexual relations, offer less dogmatic views of human sexual life. As Dodson (1974: 123) highlights in her work on masturbation as an ecstatic process: 'Tantra is an ancient science that consciously utilizes sex energy.' Extended periods of sexual activity are encouraged, with a focus on a continual flow of orgasms. Dodson highlights how in the earliest tantric texts, women had the role as teachers. Indeed, the 'highest form' (*ibid*: 124) of tantra was collective ritual sex. Yet, masturbation was the basis of its tradition. Only then followed partner sex, which featured the woman 'guiding the man in harnessing his energy to extend the time frame, prolonging sexual activity with repeated orgasms' (*ibid*). Significantly, the third step was a threesome, 'which broke through the conditioning of hoarding sex for one person' (*ibid*). This focus on multiple partners challenged the focus on possession. 'Peace and harmony came through the *collective energy* of individuals in the group rituals' (*ibid*). This tantric model resonates with the

emergent concept of Zorbitality, though its focus on individual pleasure within a collective. Yet, Zorbitality reconfigures tantra's vision, by asserting that collective ecstasy is not concerned with genital sexuality.

The importance of collective movement in developing an alternative framework for female (a)sexualities is highlighted in Martha's account of a tantric workshop, which involves women relating to one another through movement and touch, rather than genital contact. The synthesis could be read as Zorbital: it focuses on an inclusive feminine libidinal economy, with suggested poles from autoeroticism to polyamory. It also embodies a sense of collective joy, experienced deeply within the body. An important symbol in Martha's passage is the dance around the line, where bodies weave in and out of one another, in an act of reciprocity, thus disrupting the linearity of neoliberal configurations of intimacy. Indeed, as Martha's account highlights, we can touch ourselves and others in an intimate way without genital sexuality being the key factor. This leads to Martha's awareness that she is 'beautiful,' something that she had never experienced before.

Martha: ... There was one part where there was... a line on each side and then each person... went through the tunnel, and everyone was like touching... so you touched the person as you were going through... And then em... the next day we did some other exercises where... there was lots of dancing again and connecting with people and it was amazing and then we did this exercise of em just touching ourselves... not just like we would every day... but actually like you would touch... somebody intimately... And I put my hands on my foot and I was like: 'I am beautiful.' ... I got really upset again 'cause I was like: 'I've never in my life felt beautiful.' (Life history interview, 08/06/2015)

When rereading Martha's sensuous account, I realised that we need to look beyond a static image of feminine libidinal life, based around the waiting for *another's* touch. In particular, we need to find a new language for describing our intimate lives that does not give way to phallogocentrism. As Martha's account highlights, by writing about dancing experiences, we can engage in a 'dance of agency' (Spry 2001: 708), where we deconstruct cultural stereotypes and perform identities anew.

In this section, I outlined how Zorbitality's reoriented erotic poles emerged in my respondents' accounts, and how this spoke to the need to reconfigure female (a)sexualities through movement. In section 5.4, I will focus on the role of specific transformational moments in my respondents' trajectories, where their subjectivities danced and the presumed linearity of life trajectories was challenged. Rather, they looked to an ethical futurity, whilst living in an ecstatic present. Anna's memory shows how one can achieve a deep sense of connection with the broader cosmos, through solitude, while Ruth's memory highlights how transformation can be experienced when a relationship of mutual respect develops into a love that cannot be labelled. What unites the memories is the role of travel, which disrupts the linear flow of time and calls for a new engagement with space (Frohlick 2013). Whilst in sections 5.1 and 5.2, I have sought to reconfigure my respondents' memories of vulnerability through collective ecstatic motion and in section 5.3 I showed how inner ecstasy is enacted through relational models of movement, in section 5.4 I want to return to stillness. However, this is a reflective stillness, which is important for staging the transition from inner ecstasy to collective ecstatic motion in chapter 6.

5.4 - Zorbitality through transformational moments¹⁹⁵

What if our understanding of ourselves were based not on static labels or stages but on our actions and our ability and our willingness to transform ourselves? (Ensler 2013: 88)

The opening quote is taken from the memoir of the great playwright and women's rights activist, Eve Ensler. In this memoir, Ensler navigates her experiences of cancer, as well as the trauma related to being sexually abused by her father, when she was a child and young adult. Throughout the memoir, Ensler highlights the importance of continually transforming narratives. She calls us to eschew the categories that constrain us and instead encourages us to see value in our continually transforming personal processes. Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the importance of looking beyond the static tick boxes of sexual orientation (chapter 2) and the stereotypes surrounding the female

¹⁹⁵ For a visual representation of a transformational moment, see Zorbital Flow 1 (pp. 267-268).

‘asexual’ (chapter 3). I have also shown the power of collective ecstatic motion in my personal transformation (chapter 4). In this section, I will show how we may reach what I term Zorbitality, through situated *moments* of becoming – transformational moments - which challenge all that went before in our lives. This endeavour also has a conceptual connection with the history of Latin American music (see section 3.3, pp. 114-117), which developed across time and in moments of experimentation (see Madrid and Moore 2013).

The following memory, as narrated by Anna (26), highlights a transformational moment, where she experiences a total sense of oneness between self, body and world. This memory also links to broader themes surrounding agency in Anna’s narrative. Anna told me during her interview that her friend’s stepfather sexually abused her when she was fourteen years old. Yet, she did not tell anyone about it or ‘acknowledge that it had happened.’ Furthermore, Anna highlighted that ‘I tied myself in knots’ thinking that: ‘Oh, maybe I don’t like it [sex] because of this...’ Yet, as Reavey’s (2010) work on agency in survivor’s memories of child sexual abuse highlights, agency is an ambivalent process, which eschews the search for coherence in Western memory narratives. As Reavey (*ibid*: 315) asserts:

Adult survivors of sexual abuse are often encouraged to read passivity into acts of sexual agency, but this reading cannot possibly speak to the entirety of their life experiences, where acts of agency are performed and experienced positively. This position, however, need not negate the potency of the past or deny the devastating impact that abuse can have, but can provide a more complex reading of agency, afforded by a variety of private and public spaces.

Reavey’s words resonate with Anna’s memory, which she experienced a year after the sexual abuse occurred. Whilst in section 5.2, I highlighted how Anna’s agency would later be challenged when a group of men desexualised her following her positive arrival at an asexual identity, the following memory speaks volumes of how a certain spatial setting can configure agency. In this memory, Anna searches for a holding space, where she can feel safe. She finds it in a moment of ecstatic bliss, experienced alone. Yet, she feels incredibly connected with the world around her.

Anna: She was on a family holiday in Spain, 15, and uncomfortable in her body, hating the unrelenting heat of the summer. On the final night, her family plan a trip to the nearest town, wanting to have a last meal together. She begs off, reporting heatstroke and nausea, and the family agree to leave her at home for the night.

She wakes hours later, curled up on the sofa in the large communal space, having fallen asleep whilst reading. Her limbs feel heavy and awkward, and she is aware of how silent the house is. She has no idea if anyone has returned, and has a moment of reluctance to head to the room she is sharing with cousins. Instead, she slips out into the back garden, where the pool is still lit up. The garden is hot, a sense of weight from the summer heat still filling the space, and she is overcome by an urge to get into the water. Impulsively she decides against going inside to gather her swimming costume, and instead moves to sit on the edge of the pool and dip her toes in. The water feels amazing, cool and refreshing against her skin, and without thinking too much about it, she removes her pyjamas and slides into the water. All she could hear was the movement of the water, and the humming of mosquitoes, and she turned to lie on her back and stare at the stars, feeling held and safe in the water. (Life history interview, memory 4, 04/05/2015)

At the start of the memory, Anna asserts that she feels ‘uncomfortable in her body’ and with the external ‘heat’ of the summer. Her feeling of ‘nausea’ is an existential feeling, as much as a physical sensation. This reminds me of Sartre’s (1965 [1938]) novel, *Nausea*, where nausea emerges as an awareness of the banality of existence. Furthermore, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1923 [1872]), Nietzsche suggests that following Dionysian rites of ecstasy, nausea occurred when Dionysus’s followers settled back into the everyday and reached a unitary self again. Nietzsche associated this retreat back into reality with rational Apollonian thought, and Dionysianism purely with ecstatic movement. Yet, as Anna’s memory here shows, nausea quickly subsides in everyday life if one deeply experiences ecstasy. Her memory demonstrates the legacy of Dionysus as a multi-faceted god, where ‘the pattern is always one of separation and joining, of breaking into parts and reconstituting the whole. This is the Dionysian rhythm, as dictated by the seasonal cycle and by the god’s own experience in legend’ (Storm 1998: 22). Anna’s memory demonstrates what could be perceived as Zorbitality, as it shows how both the creative and destructive elements of Dionysian ecstasy may be integrated into a resistant imaginary. This appeals to Braidotti’s (2006: 33) sustainable nomadic ethics,

which views the endless vitality of life as the starting point for a transformative politics.

It is significant that Anna moves from a 'communal space,' which she occupies herself that evening, to the outdoors. She battles 'a moment of reluctance.' Yet, when outside, she follows an 'impulse.' In this way, her movement references the Zorbital process, which starts from a position of vulnerability, as she bears herself naked to the world, before turning to inner ecstasy as she acts on an instinct to move. A sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1992) is enacted, where she surpasses what she previously had expected of herself. She gets into the water and enjoys the unfamiliar sensations. Anna, lying naked, feels buoyed. She has transcended her thinking self and feels 'held and safe in the water.' This process of merging is akin to what Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1980]: 308-311) describe as 'becoming-imperceptible,' where one does not physically disappear, but where one's body merges so much with the world that one feels like part of a large and inclusive cosmos. In Deleuze and Guattari's (*ibid*: 292) words, becoming-imperceptible prevents one 'from falling under the tyranny of subjective or signifying constellations.' Furthermore, it is experienced in *an ecstatic present*, where one has a strong awareness of the supposed origins of the world, whilst performing these anew. One eliminates 'everything that exceeds the moment,' creating the feeling that one 'is 'present at the dawn of the world' (*ibid*: 309). It is perhaps fitting then that Anna lies looking at the expanse of stars in the sky at the end of the memory. Furthermore, the threefold process of becoming-imperceptible, which encourages everybody to: 'saturate, eliminate, put everything in' (*ibid*) has a strong resonance with the threefold Zorbital process (vulnerability, inner ecstasy, collective ecstasy), since movement is central to each. In both processes, one goes beyond the normative horizons that constrain human subjectivities. Yet, extending Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisations, Zorbitality acts as a resistant imaginary, where vulnerability is turned to strength through the internalisation of collective ecstatic motion. The collective is subtly evoked in Anna's memory through a connection with the world. Yet, as this analysis highlights, central to this evocation is the journey from vulnerability to inner ecstasy.

As Anna's memory suggests, being far away from home allows one to experience transformation in a shifting moment.¹⁹⁶ One eschews a previous life trajectory and goes with the flow. Anna's memory is also unique to her. Nobody else would have experienced it the same way, for she felt it with such intensity. Perhaps one could interpret her memory as a grieving process, as well as a regaining of agency, far from the scene of sexual abuse, which she had experienced not long before the memory took place. Yet, her experience did not overwhelm her. Her personal process resonates strongly with Malbon's (1999: 105) description of 'oceanic experiences.' This concept refers to experiences that involve simultaneous feelings of loss and unity, where there is 'some form of discontinuity between the physical and emotional experience of one's body and surroundings' (*ibid*: 107). Solitude is central to this process, although Anna reaches a sense of collective union through the merging that occurs. These tenets were reflected in Anna's words:

Anna: As much as I am much more comfortable in myself now, I've never recreated that feeling of just complete [*long pause*] merging with the world around me... I felt like a tiny part of something **huge** rather than this slightly awkward separate part that I felt like a lot as a teenager... that I wasn't part of anything bigger because I didn't identify in one group or another and I wasn't interested in one thing or another. I was... floating on my own, em, so to have this moment of feeling so completely consumed by something bigger than me but not feel suffocated by it was incredible. (Life history interview, 04/05/2015)

As Anna's memory shows, she did not need to be completed by another person but rather she had a 'feeling of just complete merging with the world around me.' She felt like part of 'something bigger,' without being 'consumed' by it. This connects more broadly with Anna's querying of her identity at the time and her realisation that she did not seem to fit into the world. I can remember feeling the same way at the age of 15, when I continually reflected on the lines of Elizabeth Bishop's poem, *In The Waiting Room* (1976):¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ See also Frohlick's (2013) work on women's shifting sexual subjectivities in Caribbean Costa Rica.

¹⁹⁷ Latin America was an important site of transformation for Bishop, and thus her trajectory resonates with the Zorbitality of this thesis. In 1951, she circumnavigated South America by boat, thinking she would only stay a few months. She remained in Brazil for 15 years! She studied the languages and literatures of Latin America and was particularly inspired by the Mexican poet, Octavio Paz, and the Brazilian poet, João Cabral de Melo Neto. She also developed

'Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?' (Bishop 1976, in Paulin 2004: 161)

Commenting on Bishop's poem, Edelman (1985: 182-183) asserts that a normative reading of it 'presents a young girl's moment of awakening to the separations and the bonds among human beings, to the forces that shape individual identity through the interrelated recognitions of community and isolation.' The moment of epiphany occurs, as the main protagonist hears an 'Oh' of pain, supposedly coming from her aunt inside the dentist's office. The question of where the voice comes from is also central to Anna's memory, since it is not clear from where Anna's agency comes. In his analysis of Bishop's poem, Edelman calls us to look to the scene of reading *prior* to the young Elizabeth's 'Oh' moment, where she viewed images of naked African female 'savages' in the National Geographic magazine and realised that female sexuality was subject to distortion under patriarchy. Similarly, Anna moves from reading in a communal space, to the outdoors. Perhaps Anna had been engaging in 'a process of perceiving the real and stable relationships that exist between word and image, past and present, cause and effect,' which Edelman (*ibid*: 187) describes in relation to the protagonist of Bishop's poem. The 'Oh' of Anna's memory is not articulated verbally but is a feeling, where the boundaries between inside and outside break down. Whilst this may not be seen as a conventionally 'sexual' epiphany, Anna realised that what she had experienced was deeply intimate. Furthermore, she experienced the feeling of being safe and held within her own presence, which was completely unexpected.

Anna: Em, so when I was writing these... I phoned my friend Georgie... And I was telling her about it and she was like: 'Oh no, you see that's how I feel when I have sex with Dan, that I have this moment of feeling completely connected and completely free all at the same time.' And I was like: 'I don't enjoy sex. It's not going to work as a way of me rediscovering that feeling but thank you for suggesting it!' [*laughs*]... And... I was like: 'I don't think it's something that I will ever be able to recreate, that feeling, because... it was this complete sense of this never happening again... being young and feeling small and wanting to be protected and not really knowing how to seek that out very well, em, and then feeling... just completely safe...' It was amazing. Amazing... But then it felt incredibly personal... Even someone else in that exact

a tempestuous relationship with a Brazilian architect, Lota de Macedo Soares (see Paulin 2004: xiii-xxv).

moment wouldn't have felt the same way that I did... (Life history interview, 04/05/2015)

As Anna highlights here, many women experience a sense of connection and simultaneous freedom in a sexual relationship. Yet, this is not the case for *all* women. Indeed, Anna here orientated herself towards a very particular scene that happened completely spontaneously and that simply could not be recreated. It was a transformational moment that unfolded in a space and time, where labels had completely dissolved, at the edge of the world.¹⁹⁸ Perhaps then the process of Anna's transformation is the reverse to Elizabeth's in *The Waiting Room*. Anna arguably returns to the *chora* that Kristeva describes in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984 [1974]: 25-30): a pre-verbal state laden with movement, where the young child cannot distinguish between self and world, and is yet unmarked by patriarchal structures. In contrast, young Elizabeth, aged seven, sees the African women in the National Geographic magazine, with wire wound around their necks, and is horrified. There is desire in her horror, perhaps an emergent desire for women. Yet, Anna's is not a desire for the love of one person, but rather all there is.¹⁹⁹ Perhaps it could be said, based on this analysis, that Anna's 'Oh!' moment came a number of years later, when she discovered asexuality as a personal marker, which she would subsequently move on from.

Another transformational moment came from Ruth, when she was travelling in Haifa with a woman she was falling in love with. Yet she did not know this at the time. Rather, it happened in a moment, where a touch led to a kiss. In these borderlands, in which the non-name has power over what is classifiable (Anzaldúa 1999), a moment that could be perceived as Zorbital becoming was set in motion.

Ruth: The memory of that awakening, loving relationship is fragmented, confused full of time shifts for her. Margaret was a passionate, liberal Jewish woman who wanted to be a rabbi. Ruth was an Episcopalian who had been active in her local church and was an active member of the

¹⁹⁸ This resonates with autobiographical passage 4 (pp. 155-157).

¹⁹⁹ A similar feeling was recounted by Rachel in Woolf's (2009 [1915]) *The Voyage Out*. See section 3.1 (pp. 95-96).

Christian Fellowship at the University. How did their paths cross? She no longer remembers...

It was in the hills of Haifa at a Christian retreat/ guesthouse that the realisation developed that they were in love. The air was thick with pine. It was Shabbat and they were drinking a bottle of kosher wine. The touch became a kiss and left them both stunned/ bewildered. This was not something they had expected/ planned/ imagined. Neither had ever had any lesbian experiences before so had no idea of the rollercoaster which awaited them. It was 1983; liberal America was still waking up to gay rights and AIDS was starting to bite in the gay male world.

That friendship; that relationship would change both of them forever. The paths they took from then on would never be quite what they would have been before. The intensity of their love was evident to everyone, but still it defied labels. The pull to conform both pulled them apart and made them stronger. The fight against prejudice; the desire to blend in; the ability to empathise – all were honed during that tumultuous ‘first love’ experience. The ambivalence of loving another woman, wanting to fit in, wanting to shout with joy, learning to stand up for gay rights, wanting her parents to be proud. The pain of falling short in her eyes. It all started when their paths crossed by accident and nothing was ever quite the same again. (Collective biography: session 1, group 2 - memory 2, 27/07/2015)

Ruth’s memory reverberates with Zorbitality, for her experience came as a total surprise. It disrupted the flow of time, since the relationship involved several ‘time shifts’ and since their paths ‘crossed by accident.’ It was a love that defied the Western myth of origin and romantic capitalist kitsch. In a similar way to Anna’s memory, it was an ‘awakening’ for Ruth, where the evocative setting was crucial. In Anna’s it was the hum of the mosquitoes and the cool water. In Ruth’s it was the smell of the pine and the kosher wine. Both memories occurred in places far away from home, thus highlighting Glissant’s (1997: 19) assertion that travel is ‘the enjoyment of a relation.’ As in Anna’s memory, Ruth’s offers a particular moment where her libidinal economy transformed in the *process of the moment itself* and defied whatever had gone before. Ruth’s experience was shrouded by the political climate of America where gay rights were only beginning to be spoken about and the AIDS epidemic was beginning to spread in the gay male world. She mentioned the ‘repression’ of her upbringing, which may have barred lesbian experiences from her previously, as highlighted in Butler’s (1990) work. Yet, sexual orientation as attraction to a

particular sex was not enacted. Rather, what emerged was a love that ‘defied labels.’ This resonates with Van Anders’s (2015) work, which highlights that sexual orientation is about other factors such as attraction to age or relational style.²⁰⁰ Yet, as in Anna’s memory, this was a moment that was grasped but was not to endure. Margaret could not continue the relationship, as she needed to fulfil her vocation of becoming a Rabbi. She could not defy the norms of a heteronormative culture.

Ruth commented on the ‘ambivalence’ of loving a woman. This is significant in light of Ruth’s trajectory, as she had previously only had boyfriends. Yet, this was the transformational relationship that set it all in motion. The other women in Ruth’s collective biography group, all of whom had had same-sex relationships, whether or not they were in heterosexual partnerships currently, described similar non-linear paths. This speaks of the motion inherent within queer identities. Indeed, Ruth’s and the other women’s ‘queer’ trajectories evoked Halberstam’s (2005) concepts of queer time and space, which work ‘in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction’ (Halberstam 2005: 1) and have ‘the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space’ (*ibid*: 2). Emerging at the end of the twentieth century, following the AIDS crisis, Halberstam’s theory highlights how queer identities come into being through fleeting transformative moments, which work outside of the conventional linear life trajectory, and enable a sense of ambivalent agency beyond existing societal structures.

Ruth clearly experienced both a desire to conform and for the uniqueness of their love to be recognised. This resonates strongly with Butler’s (2004) work, which highlights the ecstatic strand of queer sexualities, characterised by both joy and loss. Ruth experienced both. She wanted to ‘jump for joy.’ Yet, she was faced with the grief of loving and losing a strong-minded woman who had a greater calling. Furthermore, in the aftermath, Ruth attempted to tell her Dad that she was gay. She went out to the garden where he was working and when she told him, he pretended he had not heard her, and started talking about cats!

²⁰⁰ See pp. 74-75 of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of Van Anders’s work.

Such is the grief and erasure that sometimes comes with having to define oneself from the margins. Indeed, Ruth's first same-sex relationship and her father's response to it led to a broader personal transformation, where she decided to distance herself from the Church, since it was unaccommodating of her sexual fluidity.

In Ruth's intimate encounter, there is a sense that although bodies touched, something more was enacted. In our intimate encounters, we chose to connect ourselves to other lives, across time and space (Cavarero 2000 [1997]). This was reflected in Isadora's words:

Isadora: ... if you share that intimate level with people then my experience is that more than bodies touch, and that when more than bodies touch... there is a longing to connect lives...(Follow-up interview, 02/06/2015)

In Zorbital moments of becoming, a broader collectivity is enacted that goes beyond a dyadic structure. It holds people together through a sense of collective joy: a shared moment long gone, but never forgotten. Even if we experience the moment in solitude, as in Anna's case, we gain a broader connection with others. This thought is significant for a reconfiguration of female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, since it highlights a need for a collectivity that connects us across cultures and generations; where we may respect our differences, whilst continually rediscovering the common moves that led to our first meeting.

5.5 - Concluding remarks

Throughout the preceding sections, I have navigated the interactive relationship between vulnerability and inner ecstasy. In section 5.1, I demonstrated how three queer/asexual-identified women reached an initial inner ecstasy when they discovered the label of asexuality. Yet, this turned to vulnerability, when others reduced them to subjects of stasis, even if this contradicted the sense of movement within their trajectories. Section 5.2 showed how ecstatic female movement is not only constrained within language but also in everyday spaces. Here I drew on Katherine's memory related to the patriarchal codes of Latin

dance floors, to demonstrate a primary vulnerability. Yet, by drawing on alternative Latin dance floor scenes, which highlighted the role of the collective, I sought to rethink how women may gain inner ecstasy. Section 5.3 demonstrated how Zorbitality's erotic poles, from autoeroticism to polyamory, were evoked in my respondents' accounts. These practices allowed my respondents to reach a sense of inner ecstasy, through a subversion of the rules of monogamy. Finally, section 5.4 showed how Zorbitality may be reached in transformational moments where our subjectivities dance. Throughout, I have shown how inner ecstasy may be reached when women find their own movement, beyond constraining societal structures. Yet, in these concluding comments I engage in a Zorbital move, by commenting on the need to create a deeper connection between *all* women through collective ecstatic motion, thus prefiguring the next chapter.

In her short story, *When Women Love Men* (1997 [1976]), Rosario Ferré draws on a dance narrative to reconfigure women's ties across the boundaries of race, whilst evoking the Caribbean as a locus for what I term Zorbitality. In her story, a white aristocratic Puerto Rican woman, Isabel Luberza, opens herself to her deceased husband's former lover, the black prostitute, Isabel La Negra. Aparicio (1998: 45-46) argues that in the cultural imaginary Luberza is seen to represent the *danzón*, a dance form that epitomises 'high' European art, and la Negra is seen to represent the *plena*, which alludes to black eroticism.²⁰¹ Yet, Aparicio argues that we should not interpret this story as an example of the oppression of all women but rather as a critique of Western masculine ways of writing about women and music. Ferré creates a lineage between the women, as they open to one another beyond the societal labels that are fixed on them. In their fusion, both Isabels do not become a hybrid race, but rather hold their differences. This resonates with the Latin American model of collectivity described in the introduction to this part (see pp. 179-182), which draws on collective movement as a method of enhancing common humanity.

²⁰¹ The *danzón* is a slow formal partner dance, which originated in Cuba. The *plena* became particularly popular amongst black working class Puerto Ricans at the turn of the twentieth century. See Aparicio (1998), Chapter 2 (pp. 45-62).

The next chapter speaks to Ferré's vision. It navigates the journey between the second and third Zorbital processes: inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. It also seeks to develop a model of collectivity that values all humans, whilst holding a broader array of female subjectivities. In this chapter, I invoke and re-imagine the genealogies of three central figures to Zorbitality: the indigenous pre-Columbian subject (section 6.1), Dionysus (section 6.2) and the African colonial subject (section 6.3). The chapter builds to a climax through the narrative of Martha, whose dancing scene defies the logic of Stravinsky's sacrificial dance, where the 'virgin' dances herself to death.²⁰² She experiences the full Zorbital process, by evoking the specific configuration of West African danced rites – solo dance within a collective – which was devalued by the naturalisation of couple dance following Western colonisation of the 'New' World. Thus she calls for the reappraisal of the 'African' subject and the female 'asexual,' through resistant movement.

²⁰² See chapter 3.2 (pp. 104-107) for more on Stravinsky's *Rite*.

Chapter 6 - Zorbitality in action: Reaching collective ecstatic motion

Introduction

In Alejo Carpentier's seminal magical realist novel, *The Lost Steps* (1989 [1953]), a musicologist travels along the Orinoco River in Venezuela, searching for the origins of music. Through experiences with the Amerindian tribes he encounters, he witnesses music's magical origins in various collective rituals. The inner ecstasy he experiences leads him to develop a new compositional method. Yet, as Fuentes (1990: 12) notes, '... while he advances in space, he moves backward in time.' He will only find the origins of music in the very moment when the first sound was uttered. This creates an 'abysmal silence' (*ibid*), where the musicologist finds himself 'on the tip of Utopia' (*ibid*). However, soon he realises that utopias can never be sustained. They look back to a time long past, '... the happy land of the origins,' and forward to 'the happy age of the future' (*ibid*), whilst being far removed from the ecstatic present.

The musicologist decides to abandon utopia, yet must find his way back into the dystopian reality of New York City. His experiences of the jungle, now clearly contrasting with the grid-like pattern of New York's streets, led him to observe: 'As I had acquired the habit of walking in time to my breathing, I was amazed to see how the people around me came, went, passed one another on the wide sidewalk, in a rhythm that had nothing to do with their organic wills' (Carpentier 1989 [1953]: 250). This caused him to reflect on two important criticisms of Western culture. Firstly, he looked at the old buildings surrounding him, whilst realising that the Western world enjoyed 'preserving traditions whose origins had been forgotten' (*ibid*: 251). Secondly, he observed the monotony of people's collective movement, which he described as 'collective movement which had something of a subterranean ritual, of a dance to stamp down earth not there to be stamped...' (*ibid*: 253). This thesis has highlighted the musicologist's points by exploring origins of many kinds in relation to female (a)sexualities: sociohistorical, personal and collective. Yet, it has ultimately dismantled the myth of origin by showing how transformation is key to all genealogies. Like Carpentier, I have asserted that collective ecstasy is not embodied in unreachable worlds but rather should be harnessed in the

everyday. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to work through the relationship between inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion, whilst looking to how the spirit of the collective can be internalised as a resistant imaginary. In order to stage this, I will briefly describe the sub-elements of each of the Zorbital processes - vulnerability, inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion - and will explore where we have got to so far with these.²⁰³

Vulnerability, inner ecstasy, collective ecstatic motion: Reimagining a colonial relation

Vulnerability is an *awareness* that one is physically constrained, and that one cannot find a way to move within that space. It is an affect that underlies vital memories (see Brown and Reavey 2015): memories that are inseparable from the multiple spatial and temporal locations in which they are experienced. Yet, if one remains in a position of vulnerability, alternative futures are rendered impossible. Vulnerability is evoked in the abstract language that others use to describe us; language that can unwittingly violate us (see section 2.1, pp. 47-52 and section 5.1, pp. 184-192). Yet, vulnerability can also not be separated from the particular location in which it is experienced. My experience of vulnerability (see autobiographical passage 2, pp. 144-150) was directly connected with the space of my family home, while Katherine's memory in section 5.2 was located on the dance floor of a heteronormative club (see pp. 192-199). Vulnerability thus rotates around an axis of *abstract stasis*, forged through language, and *embodied stasis*, where the body is too firmly located in a constraining space.

Inner ecstasy concerns itself primarily with two elements: *transgression* and *creativity*, whilst potentially evoking a collective spirit. It is not directly separable from vulnerability. Inner ecstasy reached from a position of vulnerability produces a *transformative moment* (see section 5.4, pp. 211-220),²⁰⁴ which may not involve embodied physical movement. Rather, one's subjectivity can dance, through engaging with an ecstatic present, whilst

²⁰³ This will be extended in chapter 7.2, where I will provide various Zorbital flow diagrams (see pp. 267-272).

²⁰⁴ See also Zorbital Flow 1 (pp. 267-268).

forgetting the linearity of life trajectories. Transformative moments can continually be referred to over time, thus referencing a slow process of evolution. In some cases, inner ecstasy may be reached first, only to be turned to vulnerability through negative appraisal (see section 5.1, pp. 186-192).²⁰⁵ Yet, inner ecstasy can *always* be reached when we re-imagine memories of vulnerability through collective movement.²⁰⁶

Inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion form an ecstatic loop. This relationship reflects the genealogy of Latin American music and dance, which has firstly evolved through experimentation within a moment and secondly through a mixture of cultural influences over time (Madrid and Moore 2013). One can possibly reach collective ecstasy through the initial movements of a collective movement rite, without having experienced vulnerability.²⁰⁷ Yet, if a collective spirit is not internalised, then one does not fully reach what I term Zorbitality. Collective ecstatic motion comprises two elements: *common movement patterns* and *personal movement styles*. It celebrates Amerindian conceptions of time and space, where capitalist ownership is challenged, and a more equal system of exchange that values collective ecstasy is imbued in the fabric of everyday life. The internalisation of a collective spirit results in a resistant imaginary, which appeals to Braidotti's (2006: 33) sustainable nomadic ethics.²⁰⁸

In this chapter, I navigate the relationship between inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion, by unearthing collective traditions that were suppressed by Western colonisation of the 'New' World. In section 6.1, I evoke the Pre-Columbian indigenous subject by examining how women may gain bodily autonomy through collective movement rites, which suggest circular rather than linear conceptions of time and space. I draw on the cultural symbols in my respondents' memories to suggest an alternative era of peaceful conquest, prior to the arrival of Columbus. This section is useful for analysing how the

²⁰⁵ This can be seen as a reverse Zorbital Process. See Zorbital Flow 4 (pp. 270-271).

²⁰⁶ This can be seen as a Partial Zorbital Process. See Zorbital Flow 2 (pp. 268-269).

²⁰⁷ See section 6.1 (pp. 226-238) and Zorbital Flow 3 (pp. 269-270).

²⁰⁸ See Zorbital Flow 5 (pp. 271-272).

emergent concept of Zorbitality may be reached in activities that are not necessarily dance based, but still draw on common resistant movements. In section 6.2, I evoke Dionysus as the missing link between the loss of collective ecstasy in Western traditions and Latin American dance. I here highlight the most important feature of Dionysus's collective spirit: his ability to transform individual subjectivity (Seaford 2006). Drawing on my respondents' memories related to ecstasy experienced whilst dancing, I explore what makes specific danced moments Zorbital.

In section 6.3, I reconfigure the lineages of both the colonial African subject and female 'asexual,' by drawing on Martha's dancing memory. Martha's trajectory attests to what can be perceived as Zorbitality. She is experiencing transformation in her personal and professional lives, which originated largely in this danced moment, deeply personal but articulated within a collective. In my analysis, I seek to achieve two things. Firstly, I re-write the role of 'the Chosen One' in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, as I described in section 3.2 (see pp. 104-107), where a young 'virgin' dances herself to death. Secondly, I connect it to Mbembe's (2002) deconstruction of the African colonial subject and argue that her memory evokes the resistant possibilities of West African circle dance within a collective, which was devalued by Western colonisation of the 'New' World. Like section 6.1, this section therefore re-imagines a colonial relationship in terms of resistance. Martha's memory is a powerful demonstration of the full Zorbital process. Although she experiences an initial return to vulnerability, Martha reaches inner ecstasy through initial small movements and a subsequent deep connection with others. Furthermore, this danced scene has enabled personal transformation, as she has let go of rigid patterns of movement and thinking.

6.1 – Reimagining the indigenous subject: Movement, transformation, choice

Over the last number of decades, a scholarly archive has built up around the surveillance of women's bodies. Feminist scholars have drawn our attention to how women come to see their bodies as: fragmented and split off from their

selves (Martin 1987), inhibited within heteronormative spaces (Young 2005 [1980]), and as sources of anxiety that need to be controlled (Orbach 2009). Whilst Young (2005 [1980]) outlined how patriarchal culture restricts the movement of women, she did not go far enough in articulating a theory that highlights women's resistance through movement, as this thesis seeks to address. The following exchange is a useful starting point for this discussion:

Dialogue:

Ruth: ...But to me that freedom is about being able to actually *choose* to do something just *for yourself*, I suppose. Em, and... *it transforms your body as well*.

Isadora: That seems to be a theme throughout all of them, doesn't it?

Ruth: Yeah, and it is like a drug.

Isadora: It's like that ownership of your own body...

Katherine: And what your body can do for you. It's like you can take it to that place: 'cause you know, invest in your body and it responds...

[collective agreement] (Collective biography: session 2, group 2 - speaking about memory 4, 02/06/2015)

As this exchange highlights, bodily autonomy is achieved through having the choice to move for oneself. Furthermore, this motion creates a sense of ecstasy, which is like a 'drug,' since the body *transforms in the process*. These points are valuable for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, as they enable us to consider how women may harness ecstatic movement as a bulwark against patriarchal structures. This exchange also resonates with Allegranti's (2011) work on embodied performances of gender and sexuality. She argues that the body can transform across the life course and in situated moments, which enable new ways of moving. This process has a significant connection with the history of Latin American dance, as previously described in section 3.3 (see pp. 112-119), which evolved both over time, through the merging of multiple cultural influences, and through experimentation within specific moments (see Madrid and Moore 2013). Yet, the result of this history was ultimately the gradual naturalisation of the dyad and the devaluation of personal and collective ecstatic motion. This devaluation contrasts considerably with the vision my respondents expressed in their dialogue, which

could be seen as Zorbital in its evocation of an ecstasy that starts from individual bodies and extends towards the collective. I will now show how this vision was carried through into my respondents' memories of collective movement rites. In particular, I will focus on the cultural symbols evoked in my respondents' memories. This speaks to interpretative sociological and anthropological approaches (see Geertz 1974; Turner 1967), which highlight how symbols give insights into cultures. Yet, it also reinvigorates these approaches by highlighting Anzaldúa's (1999: 59) criticism of Western Ethnocentrism: 'In trying to become "objective," Western culture made "objects" of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing "touch" with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence.' Whilst I write from the position of a white Western woman, I seek to invoke symbols of indigenous cultures in a respectful way: as a way of *re-imagining* culture through performance ritual. In this way, I answer Anzaldúa's (1999: 92) call: '... in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make "sense" of them, and once they have "meaning" they are changed, transformed.' I will imagine alternative Zorbital voyages to Columbus's voyage of 'discovery,' by evoking the figure of the Pre-Columbian indigenous subject,²⁰⁹ who enables us to rethink the female 'asexual' as indigenous subject of Western sexuality discourses.²¹⁰

Isadora (50) recounts a memory of a yoga class, which resonates with Zorbitality, since it is a movement rite where individuals are drawn together by a collective spirit.

Isadora: She was in a room of relative strangers at her weekly yoga class but the space between each body and each person was carefully respected. Although separate they were together, although together they were separate and on their own unique path. The atmosphere in the room was scented with incense, Hindu gods and words of affirmation - created, safe, structured, themed - and as she lay there under the dark sky beyond with her eyes closed and her body completely at rest kept warm by a woollen cashmere shawl she felt completely at one and free with her body. With each asana she felt stronger, with each in breath she seemed to pour into the smallest of spaces that had been tight or empty

²⁰⁹ As Anzaldúa (1999: 26) notes, the original inhabitants of the Americas came from Asia, via the Bering Strait, no earlier than 15000 years ago.

²¹⁰ See p. 53 and p. 188 of this thesis for more on the 'asexual' as indigenous subject of Western sexuality discourses.

just an hour or so before. And as the evening unfolded with one movement after another in a sequence of bends and stretches she felt like the green juice of life and of growth was lengthening her limbs and filling her with a grace and beauty that made outward appearances seem shallow and unimportant; she felt completely free within her body and her mind like all of yesterday's and tomorrow's troubles were out of reach. (Collective biography: session 2, group 2 - memory 4, 02/06/2015)

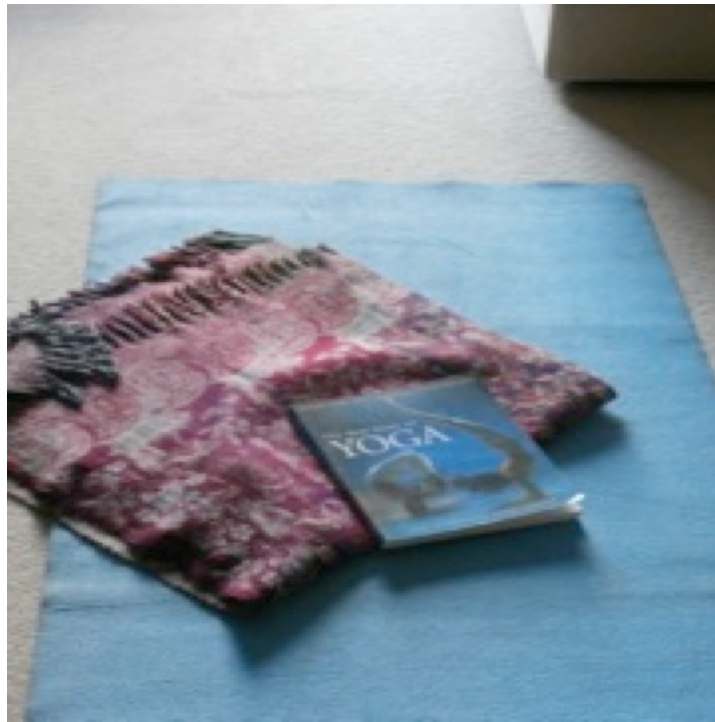


Image 1: Isadora - *Yoga* - it's a very neutral space for me, but it's also a very feminine space. It allows me to feel very at one with myself.

As Isadora's memory shows, one can feel self-contained whilst connected with others in a safe and carefully delineated space: 'Although separate they were together...' Time stands still and the space between each body is 'respected.' Furthermore, the broader presence of Hindu gods, who welcome diversity amongst human beings (see Nanda 1996), make all feel included. Through their synchronised flowing movements, the class participants move together and follow their 'own path.' Yet, there is a sense that this path is not linear, but moving in and between points of intensity, much like Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) concept of rhizomatic structures. The ambience of the setting instils a sense of positive growth and creativity. In yoga, the body and consciousness unite and cannot be viewed as separate. The various stages of yoga also mark it as a flow experience (see Csikszentmihalyi 1992), where one

loses track of linear time and reaches a sense of joy, which can be enacted whenever one engages in the activity. The stages of yoga are: an ethical preparation, where one changes one's attitudes (*yama*), obedience through ordered routines (*niyama*), a sense of not getting distracted (*asana*) and the use of breath control (*pranayama*). One consequently learns to see, feel and hear only what one wants (*pratyahara*), through a focus on a single stimulus (*dharana*). Finally, one reaches a sense of merging with universe and environment, within the present moment.²¹¹ Isadora demonstrates this sense of transformative movement, as she finds herself able to 'pour into the smallest of spaces that had been tight or empty just an hour or so before.' Thus, her body *transforms* through the act of movement, as she experiences 'the green juice of life and growth,' whilst reaching a sense of timelessness, where the 'evening unfolded with one movement after another.' Isadora's memory could be read as Zorbital, for it moves from inner ecstasy to ecstatic collective movement, to an internalisation of a collective spirit.²¹² Thus, she has reached the sense of collective ecstasy that Ehrenreich (2007) describes as a missing aspect of twenty-first century life. I can relate to Isadora's words, as this is how I feel after engaging in a Zumba class. This suggests that what can be termed Zorbitality can be transferred across various flow activities, but the nature of this flow, rooted in collective ecstasy, is always the core.

Isadora's memory is vital for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, since it highlights how women can find a space to move freely, where gender does not play a role and a collective focus on the wellbeing of each human is key. Thus, her memory evokes the Latin American model of collectivity I discussed in the introduction to part III (see pp. 179-182). The words that accompany her yoga photo are essential to this process: 'it's a very neutral space for me, but it's also a very feminine space.' This remark suggests that movement itself is gender neutral. When a space is not written with patriarchal codes, a positive awareness of one's gender and sexuality is enacted, where genital sexuality is balanced with other aspects of one's being. One could

²¹¹ See Csikszentmihalyi (1992: 103-108) for more details of yoga as a flow experience.

²¹² This can be seen as a partial Zorbital Process. See Zorbital Flow 3 (pp. 269-270).

say that collective movement is the driving force of a neutral space. Perhaps the connection between neutral and feminine, therefore, is a Zorbital orientation, which refuses the assumption that the female body is waiting to be marked by patriarchal codes. Rather, collective movement can be the basis of an alternative feminine libidinal economy, which acts as a sustainable resource. Although being practiced in a Western cultural context, Isadora's experience does not essentialise the Hindu gods she evokes. Instead, she draws on the power of their collective spirit, which propels her towards transformation.

Since the Zorbital analysis of this thesis seeks to reconfigure Columbus's conquest of the 'New' World, on a deeper level Isadora's could be seen to re-imagine a colonial encounter. When Columbus was engaging in his voyage of 'discovery,' he thought he had reached India. In fact, he had reached a different land, which later became known as the Caribbean. Columbus would refer to the indigenous people he encountered as 'Indian,' because of this error of judgement. Countering this, Isadora's memory evokes peaceful voyages to and between the 'New' World and India, which Lal Chaman²¹³ (1940: xvi) asserts may have happened millennia *prior to* Columbus's arrival.²¹⁴ Isadora's memory also suggests a connection between Amerindian concepts of time and space and Hindu meditative practices, which Chaman Lal (*ibid*) references. Hindus may have taken their various cultural and religious practices with them, which focused on the wellbeing of all humans and the role of transformation in human life.²¹⁵ Both Pre-Columbian²¹⁶ and Hindu peoples worshipped multiple gods and goddesses, with female goddesses having powerful creative roles.²¹⁷ However,

²¹³ Whilst Lal Chaman's work could be dismissed as ethnocentric, I utilise it as a *possible* narrative, which predates the 'colonial wound' that Mignolo (2005: 8) describes.

²¹⁴ Various theories of Pre-Columbian contact with the Americas exist. See Riley, Kelley, Pennington and Rands (2012) for a comprehensive discussion of these. I draw on Hindu influence, as it enables a deconstruction of the concept of 'Indianness,' which I evoked in my reconfiguration of Katherine's memory through *conchero* dance (see pp. 197-199).

²¹⁵ Anthropological and ecological evidence exists to suggest a Pre-Columbian transatlantic trade route between the Americas and India. See Pokharia, Kumar, Sekar, Pal and Srivastava (2009).

²¹⁶ The oldest known Pre-Columbian peoples were the Olmecs (c. 1200-400 BC) followed by the Mayans (c. 250-900 AD) [both in present-day Mexico], the Incas (c. 1438-1532 AD) [Peru] and the Aztecs (c. 1200-1500 AD) [Mexico].

²¹⁷ Evidence of Hindu influence in Mesoamerica includes the worship of Tlaloc, the Rain-God in ancient Aztec culture, who bears striking similarities to Ganesha in the Hindu tradition. Notable

as Lal Chaman (*ibid*) notes, much of the evidence related to the connection between Hindu and Amerindian peoples was destroyed by the colonisers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thus adding another layer to an already potent colonisation. Perhaps then, Isadora's memory enables us to envision an alternative history, where peaceful voyages to and from multiple locations are the key to transaction, gender and cultural boundaries have broken down, and cohesiveness is forged through collective motion itself.²¹⁸ This is an imaginative possibility, if one harnesses Keightley and Pickering's (2012) work on the mnemonic imagination, which highlights the vital role of the imagination in the process of remembering. Consequently, the indigenous subject of the colonial encounter emerges neither as sacrificed nor liberated, but as capable of sustaining an alternative history through storytelling. This also suggests a way of rethinking the female 'asexual' as indigenous subject of Western culture, beyond a coloniser's discourse.

A memory recounted by Ruth (52) also evokes an alternative pre-Columbian voyage, through the symbol of the dragon boat, a long wooden paddle boat that originated in China around 3000 years ago (see Chan and Zhang 2007). The Dragon Boat Festival is still celebrated worldwide every year, around the time of the summer solstice. As legend recounts, this is to commemorate the death of the poet, Qu Yuan, who committed suicide in 278 BC (Gray 1878). In the Western world, dragon boats have become synonymous with competitive rowing competitions, since dragon boat racing became a modern sport in Hong Kong in 1976 (Du and Kyong-McClain 2013). Yet, the origins of this practice, rooted in the people's race out to save Qu Yuan, are often forgotten. Interestingly, the dragon also surfaces through the dominant presence of the serpent in the Pre-Colombian Americas (see Ruz Lhuillier 1970). Therefore, if we draw on the spirit of magical realism (see Flores 1955), Ruth's memory of

goddesses are Kali in the Hindu tradition, who liberates humans from the destructive aspects of the ego, and *Ixazalvoh*, the Mayan goddess of weaving, who was worshipped for her life-giving powers.

²¹⁸ This reminds me of Mattapoisett in Piercy's (1979 [1976]) *Woman on the Edge of Time*. See section 3.1 (pp. 98-102).

training on a dragon boat racing team for the World Championships highlights an alternative history.

Ruth: Training in her O1 made her feel free. Just her, the boat, the training session, her watch. The beeps of the watch counting out the intervals. Did she really have to do another set? Couldn't she cut it short? But no – races are won through hard work, being there, putting in the effort...

The team raced against the men's teams and started to beat them. Oh, the day they beat the marines. That call that some of them heard as they passed the marines' boat – 'they're a bunch of girls!' Everyone was beaming, they had done it, they could now go out and win against the best women's teams in the world.

Five years later she stood on top of a podium for the first time taking gold. They each had their own reactions to being on top of the world. She'd been there from the beginning, when they came last in Hong Kong so knew the struggle they had overcome to get to this point. It felt amazing. They sang Queen's 'We are the Champions' over and over. They felt invincible. She had done it – she had realised her dream and reached the sun. (Collective biography: session 2, group 2 - memory 4, 02/06/2015)

Ruth's memory highlights how our bodies can physically and relationally transform through movement. It resonates with Isadora's, through its focus on collective ecstatic motion and the surpassing of linear time. Ruth enjoys working towards a goal, using her body to its maximum capacity and defeating a team of male rowers. Whilst beating the clock of 'linear' time is evidenced in the memory, Ruth achieves a sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1992), as the activity is lived in the moment and she surpasses her expectations. When we find a flow activity, we overcome any initial discomfort and gain satisfaction in our growing strength. Ruth subsequently manages to transgress the heteronormative politics of everyday space, where women are often objectified (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997).

In dragon boat racing, one person beats a drum, which marks the frequency of the rower's strokes. One can imagine this resistant drum beating in Ruth's memory, just like the *conga* drum of the West African slaves in the 'New' World (see Fryer 2000). Furthermore, the other women in the team support and

propel Ruth forward. To be more specific, the choreographed and familiar movements of rowing, and the resistant drum, enable them to mobilise. Ruth's memory thus extends Rich's (1980) lesbian continuum, by showing how women's shared collective rhythms can create new genealogies. Indeed, at the end of the memory, Ruth and her team members express a sense of collective joy, as they repeatedly sing Queen's *We Are The Champions*.

As in Isadora's memory, Ruth's evokes an alternative colonial encounter, beyond the 'colonial wound' that Mignolo (2005: 8) highlights. Key to this is the symbol of the boat on water. As I have highlighted throughout this thesis, the ship is a symbol of Western domination (see Guardiola-Rivera 2010). Yet, it can also be a symbol of an alternative feminine libidinal economy, where movement is the starting point of our expansion. Ruth's memory allows us to reflect on what colonial history would have been like if Western men had not seized power and had not developed the capitalist system of exchange. What, for instance, if women had held the power? Or, what if the native populations had been allowed their share of the rule, where a collective spirit that valued all people would have been prized? The answer is suggested at the end of Ruth's memory, when the women jump for joy, having passed out the colonisers: the marines. Ruth's memory offers us the possibility of an alternative Empire, made possible through her team-mates' collective motion, which transcends the boundaries of class, race or sexuality.

Ruth's memory also allowed me to reflect on transformative voyages undertaken by other respondents. Kali, an Indian woman, aged 72, who has lived in London for over 50 years reflected on her turbulent family life and subsequent passage to England, just prior to the passing of the Commonwealth Immigration Act in Britain in 1962. She asserted that she had 'no right to exist' in India, as she was low in the caste system. Whilst she highlighted the violence of British colonial rule in India, she also asserted that Muslim rule had been more tyrannical. Yet, few history books write of this. In reality, she had travelled many times between India and England prior to her final move, having

attended boarding school in England as a child. However, this was the decisive voyage that set her transformation in motion.

Kali: Well, the first time I came to England was in a boat, so that was a very interesting trip, coming from India to here, and I became more and more Anglicised as the boat journey drew on. But of course I knew what I'd left behind and how artificial this differentiation is, and how privilege is always geared to the West, which I think is very unfortunate really, because my criteria of myself would be very very Indian and the tradition is Hindu and Dharmic... but at the same time... I could feel it was going to be a better life for me. (Life history interview, 23/04/2015)

Kali's account highlights Western privilege and its role in the subordination of the 'Other' (see Mignolo 2005: xii). Whilst Kali is an indigenous subject in her memory, and is aware she is becoming 'Anglicised,' she is also moving towards horizons of freedom. As I mentioned in chapter 3.1 (see pp. 92-97) in my discussion of Woolf's (2009 [1915]) *The Voyage Out*, which reflects on both the colonisation of Latin America and British colonial rule, the ship is 'a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion' (Gilroy 1995: 4). Indeed, the ship brought Kali to a land where she would be involved in the women's liberation movement and would travel the world, seeing how Marxism worked in Cuba, China and Central Asia. Like Rachel in Woolf's novel, Kali was often treated with contempt in the feminist movement, since she has been 'asexual' for most of her life. Other women often reduced her to a subject of stasis, saying that she was single because she 'could not get a man.'²¹⁹ Commenting on her experiences, Kali said that 'women's solidarity is a very shaky business.' Furthermore, she highlighted how the constraints of monogamy are largely associated with the worship of one God.

Kali: So it's the Abrahamic mindset: the correct God, the one God, the compulsory God. This mindset is a terrible terrible curse on thinking because it inhibits freedom and you need lots and lots of power and military might to force it down other people's throats. (Life history interview, 23/04/2015)

Kali's words are important for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. They suggest that the worship of many gods, including non-human

²¹⁹ This point resonates with both my discussion of the feminist movement and its exclusion of asexual-identified women in section 2.3 (see pp. 80-84) and Connie's initial assessment of Sybil's 'lack' of sexual desire in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (see section 3.1, p. 99).

deities, and an internalisation of different aspects of their personas, offers a more ethical vision for society, beyond narratives of Western domination.²²⁰ This is perhaps why movement has fundamentally defined her life. Whilst her example does not deal with Latin America specifically, it allows us to reflect on how a vulnerable passage to an unfamiliar place can offer alternative forms of life, which allow women to retain their core in movement. Kali acknowledged 'what London has given me and also these goddesses that have formed my role models.' Likewise, I transformed for the better in London and found my own collective ritual: Zumba, harnessed by three wonderful teachers. I therefore felt a strong connection to Kali and expressed this to her. She asserted that 'it's a wonderful validation.' Mine was perhaps the voice she had been seeking in the women's liberation movement of the 1970s.

Whilst in Kali's account, I have drawn on the image of the ship as an enabler of collective ecstasy and transformation, I will finish by exploring a symbol of 'military might,' which is metaphorically evoked in Kali's memory: the war horse (see Edwards, Enenkel and Graham 2011). The war horse is transformed into an emblem of peaceful protest in Titania's memory of horse riding with her friends in an army barracks.

Titania: ... The rule was that you didn't take the horses any faster than a trot if you weren't saddled. Naturally she and all her friends went for mad gallops up and down the showground at any opportunity. This time, though, she knew she wasn't coming back and couldn't get in any trouble. As soon as she was through the camp gate she cantered the mare straight up the hill and galloped along the edge of the range to the electric fenced gate. She knew several of the livery owners out in the fields would be unimpressed, but it didn't matter because she was leaving and there could be no consequence. (Collective biography: session 2, group 1 - memory 4, 03/05/2015)

In this memory, Titania (20) is constrained by a patriarchal space: the army camp where her father is stationed. Yet, she and her friends collectively dance around the patriarchal rule of the camp, which inspires Titania to ride her mare up the hill. It is significant that she chooses the words 'cantering along the edge of the range.' As the title of this thesis attests, within patriarchy and capitalist

²²⁰ Indeed, this vision was reflected in Pre-Columbian religious culture (see Coe 1968).

enterprises, women are constrained within strictly delineated spaces. Yet, as I have previously described in my analysis of Piercy's (1979 [1976]) *Woman on the Edge of Time* (see pp. 98-102), transgression is possible when we challenge patriarchal rule through collective ecstatic motion.

The image of Titania bravely riding her mare and proudly asserting that she is 'leaving,' reminds me of George Bernard Shaw's (1924) preface to his play, *Saint Joan*. He seeks to reconfigure the legacy of Joan of Arc²²¹ beyond myths of witchcraft and sexual timidity. Rather, he highlights Joan's ecstatic movement and vital life: 'There was nothing peculiar about her except the vigor and scope of her mind and character, and the intensity of her vital energy' (*ibid*: 20). What the Joan of Bernard Shaw's rendition fears most is the chaining of her feet, 'so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills...' (*ibid*: 137). Similarly, although she is not physically dancing, Titania dances on the edge of time through a transgression of expected laws. In this way, she dances with a lineage of other women who have transgressed similar boundaries in peaceful protest, across history and cultural tradition.

The specific symbol that dominates Titania's memory - the horse - enables us to reassess the suppression of collective ecstasy, which the colonisers exercised as a tyrannical strategy in the 'New' World. The horse is an ambivalent political symbol. For instance, in Ancient Celtic culture it represented war, whilst in Amerindian culture it was a symbol of freedom, which could be drawn upon to benefit the tribe (Owusu 1999: 239). Thus, within Amerindian conceptions, the horse has a broader connection to a collective spirit, which values the wellbeing of all humans. Harnessing its force, we can wage an alternative warfare, a war that re-imagines colonial history in terms of equal exchange.

All four women's memories are essential for re-evaluating female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, as they show how movement itself is the *basis* of women's libidinal lives. Each memory stages a vital journey from inner ecstasy to

²²¹ Joan of Arc was a great military leader who was accused of witchcraft by English and French forces. She was burnt at the stake in on 30 May 1431.

collective ecstatic motion, and highlights how a collective spirit can be internalised as a resistant imaginary. Through my imaginative reading of the cultural symbols evoked in the memories - Hindu Gods, the dragon boat, the ship and the 'war' horse - I have highlighted the vital role of coordinated collective motion, both physical and spiritual, in creating a more ethical society for all. Indeed, this coordinated collective movement was a central feature of pre-Columbian rituals (Guardiola-Rivera 2010). As I have argued, myths surrounding Columbus's 'discovery' and the wounded colonial subject obscure the possibility that Pre-Columbian populations may have had multiple contact points with other cultures prior to Columbus's arrival, encouraging peaceful exchange. Therefore, on a deeper level, my respondents' memories have offered alternative visions of colonial expansion to those of the age of Western exploration in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Ultimately, I have sought to reconfigure the indigenous subject of the colonial encounter through a resistant imaginary, so that he/she is neither seen as wholly sacrificed nor liberated. By imagining alternative Pre-Columbian voyages, I have simultaneously evoked the female asexual as an indigenous subject of Western sexuality discourses, and have highlighted the importance of not reducing her to a static subject. Rather, I have shown how alternative histories allow us to reconfigure female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion. I will carry these thoughts into section 6.2, where I will demonstrate how Zorbitality may be accessed through specifically danced moments. I will explore what makes a danced movement Zorbital, before drawing on Martha's narrative to demonstrate Zorbitality as a transformative process. In order to achieve this, I will return to the lineage of Dionysus.

6.2 - Finding Zorbitality

This section offers a temporal hiatus. It takes a step back to the collective ecstatic rites of Dionysus in Ancient Greece. In doing so, it engages in a Zorbital move, which acts as a point of connection with both the 'New' World indigenous subject of section 6.1, and the colonial African subject, who I will evoke in

Martha's memory in section 6.3. As I mentioned in section 3.3 (see pp. 112-119), the erasure of Dionysus has not only a link with the suppression of collective ecstasy within the Western tradition, but also with the colonisers' devaluation of the collective traditions of indigenous and West African peoples in the 'New' World. Thus, European notions of expansion and progress have an intricate connection with the subjugation of other forms of knowledge (Mignolo 2005: xii). The colonisers took advantage of the belief systems of other peoples, and *capitalised* on them. We are still dealing with this loss. Yet, in this section, I want to reconfigure the colonial narrative through Dionysus's resistant collective spirit.

As described in section 3.3, Dionysus was the mythical Greek god of collective ecstasy, who had a cult following in Ancient Greece, from approximately 3500 to 2000 BC. His devotees would dance themselves into ecstatic trances, most of which would not end in sexual consummation (see Ehrenreich 2007). Representations of Dionysus have transformed throughout time and Dionysus is thus a manifestation of a collective identity (Storm 1998). As Seaford (2006) describes, Dionysian ecstasy is neither concerned with the contradictions between ecstatic and tragic states, nor with the dissolution of boundaries, as Nietzsche (1923 [1872]) suggests. Rather, its central power is its ability to 'transform individual identity' (Seaford 2006: 11), through an internalisation of the collective. In this section, I will show how Dionysus's spirit was evoked in Margot's and Sasha's memories of dancing. Yet, I will argue that they do not fully reach Dionysian ecstasy, for they lack an internalisation of his transformative spirit. I will draw on Martha's trajectory to show how this conception may be reached and will explain why this transformative power is important for reconfiguring female (a)sexualities via Zorbitality.

In her memory, Margot (25) noted a feeling of transcendental bliss when she danced under the influence of drugs.

Margot: She doesn't really remember ever feeling 'completely' free within her body. She doesn't even really know what that would mean. The closest would probably be in a club, dancing, high, when she was around 15-16. Taking ecstasy has that effect... There are a few moments

of total bliss that she remembers, being surrounded by people, feeling safe. Once sinking to the floor, to sit down on the steps, just glowing with deep bliss. But even by then the knowledge that it would fade. But that was more feeling without her body, rather than within. (Life history interview, Memory 4, 26/05/2015)

This memory can be read as superficially Dionysian, through its association with 'ecstasy,' 'deep bliss' and 'feeling safe' with others. Yet, it could not be read as a Zorbital experience, since Margot did not really feel free within her body.

In order to analyse Margot's memory, it is important to look briefly to the history of clubbing and rave culture. As Pini's (1997: 117) work demonstrates, the rave scene in the 1980s and 90s 'enabled an escape from the traditional associations between dancing, drugged-up women and sexual interaction.' Furthermore, raving offered women the possibility of finding 'new ways of experiencing themselves, and to transform their understandings of inter subjectivity' (*ibid*: 118). Indeed, the club dance floor is very different than the heteronormative bar, which I invoked in Katherine's memory in section 5.2 (see pp. 192-199), since the sexualisation of the dancing female body is decentralised. Furthermore, as McRobbie (1994: 168) highlights, clubbing culture allows 'pure physical abandon in the company of others without requiring the narrative of sex or romance.' Although Malbon (1999) challenges this view in his empirical work, where many women clubbers speak of clubbing spaces as highly sexualised, the clubbing space *potentially* offers women a space to play with their sexualities, with some downplaying it and others emphasising it for performative effect.²²² These observations have particular relevance for Margot's memory, since they enable us to begin thinking about the clubbing *space* and its relationship with the reconfiguration of female (a)sexualities via Zorbitality. Clearly, there is a connection, since the clubbing space is centred more on the power of the crowd than the dyad. Yet, her memory cannot be read as Zorbital, for a number of fundamentals are lacking.

²²² As Malbon (1999) asserts, there are two types of clubbing experience. The first combines a simultaneous feeling of freedom and belonging, which he refers to as 'oceanic experiences' (*ibid*: 105). I drew on this when analysing Anna's memory in section 5.4 (see pp. 212-217). The second involves the use of recreational drugs.

Firstly, Margot lacks a strong sense of collective identification. As mentioned previously (see p. 225), the two main features of collective ecstasy are the celebration of personal styles of movement and the utilisation of shared resistant movement figures. Whilst Margot's memory references the power of personal expression, a shared rhythmic culture is not evident. Secondly, she is under the influence of drugs. As Malbon (1999: 100) asserts, in chemically induced ecstasy, deep collective identification rarely occurs 'and when it does occur is usually fleeting.' Margot endorses a similar perspective in her memory, with the realisation that her joy will 'fade.' Yet, as I have highlighted, Zorbitality is generated from within one's own body. It can be seen as a resistant imaginary, since it can be continually replicated, both when one imagines and engages in collective movement. Collective ecstasy need not be 'extraordinary,' as Malbon (*ibid*: 127) suggests.²²³ Rather, as section 6.1 showed, it can be found in everyday collective movement rites where personal movement styles are allowed, within a set of common resistant rhythms. The limitations of Margot's memory highlight the need to integrate collective joy into *everyday* life, through a resistant imaginary.²²⁴ This has considerable importance for re-imagining female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, since, as this thesis has highlighted, female ecstatic thought and movement are constrained by static language and invasions in public space.

A closer relation to Zorbitality can be found in the account of Sasha (33), who conveyed a contemporary Dionysian experience: dancing with her friends at a springtime rave in the fields. This closer relation is enabled, as she takes her Dionysian experiences from a contained indoor space into the outdoors. As Storm (1998) highlights, Dionysus experienced his reassemblage during the spring season, and thus Sasha's experience could be seen to continue his legacy, where fragmentation is turned to wholeness through collective ecstasy. Although Sasha's friends drunk alcohol and may have taken drugs, Sasha did not, since she was pregnant (see image 2).

²²³ This deficit is also reflected in the conclusion to Malbon's book, where he draws on 'three stories of afterglow,' yet fails to offer an integrated everyday politics. He too readily assumes that oceanic experiences only last moments if not drug-induced.

²²⁴ See my account in section 7.3 (pp. 273-277).



Image 2: Sasha - May Morning rave: *My friends, drunk and dancing, in a field at 8am on May Morning in Oxford. Going to a rave visibly pregnant subverts the norms of femininity and motherhood. I hate the sweet, saccharine, infantilising attitude to pregnancy. I find myself actively resisting - dancing, eating things I shouldn't, swearing in public.*

In her account, Sasha subverts the infantile image of the pregnant woman and engages in a Dionysian rebirth. Her words resonate with the emergent concept of Zorbitality, since she defies social roles and highlights the joy of movement itself. Yet, one gets the sense that the collective ecstasy was not integrated into Sasha's or her friends' everyday lives after this rite took place. The imagined absence of collective ecstasy that Sasha's account evokes creates a sense of loss, which resonates with Seaford's (2006: 146) words:

One aspect of the development of humankind has been (uneven) progression towards the alienation of individuals from nature and from each other... But absence implies the possibility of presence, and the absence and presence of the transcendent power that unites us with nature and with each other is projected onto an imagined person, Dionysos.

Seaford highlights a significant aspect that is lacking in Margot's and Sasha's memories: the internalisation of a transformative collective spirit, as embodied in the mythical figure of Dionysus. Indeed, what Margot's and Sasha's examples

do not quite capture is Zorbitality as a *transformative process*, which can continuously transform human subjectivity, even in moments of vulnerability. I will now show how Martha's trajectory evokes this transformative Dionysian process, before staging the danced scene that set her transformation in motion in section 6.3.²²⁵

Evoking Dionysus: Martha's transformative process

Martha's trajectory embodies the transformative collective spirit of Dionysus. At the moment, Martha (34) is experiencing a process of transformation in both her personal and professional lives. For many years Martha had relationships with men and did not feel comfortable in them. She began to develop feelings for a woman at work and they slept together. She then realised that she really wanted to be with women, although she regretted losing her boyfriend, who was her 'best friend.' Although she did not continue the relationship with her work colleague, she met her girlfriend soon after, in 2009. Martha told me that she has been through an 'intense period' and that she is in 'the middle' of something right now. She also asserted that my research has been a 'trigger' for her transformation, after things 'rumbling under the surface' for months. Martha's transformative process is significant, for it is suggestive of what could be termed Zorbitality: the internalisation of a transformative collective spirit as a resistant imaginary. Thus, Martha's trajectory evokes the transformative power of Dionysus, which was lacking in Margot's and Sasha's memories.

Soon after meeting her now girlfriend and leaving her physiotherapy job in London, Martha went travelling on her own in New Zealand and South East Asia. Although she had worked as a physiotherapist before and had studied craniosacral therapy on the side, during her travels she realised that she wanted to make her psychotherapy practice the main focus of her career. Travelling allowed her the space to 'move on' from place to place, whilst granting her 'so much space' to think of what she wanted. This is a powerful evocation of the

²²⁵ It may seem more logical to include details of Martha's trajectory in section 6.3. However, I reference it here as part of the Zorbital flow. In section 6.3, I will focus on the specific moment of Martha's transformation.

way travel can broaden the mind, and enable personal growth and transformation (see Frohlick 2013).²²⁶ During her time in India, Martha took part in a *vipassana* meditation workshop and viscerally realised that she had deeply violated herself each time she had had a sexual relationship with a man.

Martha: I had this **huge** realisation that every time I had sex with a guy I was punishing myself, and I felt it really really physically, and it was so painful to realise that. (Life history interview, 08/02/2015)

Indeed, part of the reason why Martha's trajectory can be said to be a path of Zorbital transformation is that she draws on her body as a source of knowledge, much as Spry (2001) achieves in her work on performance ethnography. For example: during my research, Martha realised that she had never been recognised as an adult woman and experienced 'a rush of sadness, an eruption of tears, guttural crying from the belly - uncontrollable.' This vulnerability contrasted with her professional role, where she always spoke up for women of alternative sexualities within a patriarchal working environment. She began to realise that all the 'independent' things she had done to try and make her appear strong hid her vulnerabilities, namely that: 'I never ever let anyone help me' and 'I never let other people see me.' Her account of growing up in Catholic Ireland and the sense of somatic shame that this brought, also resonated with mine.²²⁷ Equally, it took moving away from home to come to realisations about our (a)sexualities, so deeply ingrained were the patriarchal structures in our home environments.²²⁸

Yet, like me, Martha has managed to transcend the sense of growing up in a 'shameful' body. Martha views the relationship between the body, identity and sexuality as situated and relational. She acknowledges how identities may shift over time and how the body itself is constantly 'evolving.' Central to her vision is 'following what it is that you need and want at that time.' Martha's account resonates with Zorbitality, for she highlights the needs of the vital body. Furthermore, her process reflects the trajectory of Latin American music, which has evolved through multiple cultural influences over time and in moments of

²²⁶ See also autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (pp. 154-162).

²²⁷ See p. 139 of this thesis.

²²⁸ See autobiographical passage 2 (pp. 144-150).

experimentation (Madrid and Moore 2013). She eschews the linear developmental model, which devalues human idiosyncrasies and the role of the moving body in its own personal evolution.

It is not surprising that Martha uses the analogy of 'flow' to describe her current relationship with her girlfriend. 'Flow' has been an important word throughout this thesis, especially in my discussion of Zumba as a Dionysian rite (see pp. 119-135) and autoeroticism as a sexual practice (see Katherine's memory, pp. 201-204). Csikszentmihalyi (1992) asserts that a flow activity is one we did not expect to enjoy. Through engaging with it and setting ourselves challenges, we lose self-consciousness and begin to enjoy ourselves. True happiness emerges when we surpass all previous self-perceptions and reach a deep connection with others. This resonates with Martha's trajectory, as she had previously not expected to fall in love with women, or to experience the 'depth of connection' she immediately had with her girlfriend. In this way, she has found both a personal style of movement and a shared rhythm in her relationship, both of which are the essential features of Dionysian collective ecstasy.

Martha's trajectory has been building to the following dancing memory, which is the climax within the Zorbital flow of this thesis. I will show how Martha's memory reconfigures the sacrificial dance of Stravinsky's (1913) *Rite of Spring* through an evocation of a West African dancing configuration, characterised by solo dance within a collective. Indeed, this specific configuration is vital for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. As I described in section 3.2 (see pp. 104-107), in Stravinsky's sacrificial dance, the young 'virgin' must dance herself to death. Yet, in contrast, Martha dances herself to life, through the propelling motion of the collective. By transforming in the process, Martha both evokes Dionysus as a collective spirit that transforms individual subjectivity and enables a re-configuration of the African colonial subject. I will engage with this by drawing on Pavlicevic and Ansdell's (2009) work on 'collaborative musicing,' which decentres the dyad in intersubjective relations, and Mbembe's (2002) work on African self-writing, which encourages us to re-evaluate the role of sacrifice, so that new subjectivities can be enabled through

‘self-styling’ (*ibid*: 242). Whilst sections 6.1 and 6.2 concerned themselves with the passage from inner ecstasy to collective ecstatic motion, I will show how Martha’s memory enables the full Zorbital process.²²⁹ She initially experiences vulnerability, yet transforms this into inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion in the process of the dance itself. Furthermore, she has internalised this collective spirit as a resistant imaginary.

6.3 - Defying Stravinsky’s Sacrificial Dance: Evoking West African rites

At no time during the dance does the Chosen Maiden show the personal terror that ought to fill her soul. She carries out a rite; she is absorbed by a social function, and without any sign of comprehension or of interpretation, she moves as dictated by the desires and impulses of a being vaster than herself, a monster filled with ignorance and appetites, with cruelty and darkness (Rivière 1913, in Kirstein 1975: 168).

*

Through sacrifice, the African subject transforms his or her own subjectivity and produces something new – something that does not belong to the domain of a lost identity that must at all costs be found again, but rather something radically different, something open to change and whose theory and vocabulary remain to be invented (Mbembe 2002: 269).

The opening quotes offer ways into a Zorbital analysis of Martha’s memory. In the first quote, Rivière interprets the role of the Chosen One in the sacrificial dance of Stravinsky’s ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (1913),²³⁰ based on his viewing of the work’s premiere. Rivière sees the Chosen One as subsumed to a social function, dancing herself to death like an automaton.²³¹ The Chosen One’s asexuality as chosen ‘virgin’ is viewed negatively, and associated with ‘ignorance’ and ‘darkness.’ This thesis has sought to challenge such a vision, by highlighting how women may engage in a collective dance of ecstasy with regards to their (a)sexualities. In my analysis here, I will therefore reconfigure Stravinsky’s sacrificial dance, by asserting that Martha’s memory demonstrates a dance to life.

²²⁹ It could be described as a transformative Zorbital process (resistant imaginary). See Zorbital Flow 5 (pp. 271-272).

²³⁰ See section 3.2 (pp. 104-107) for more details of the work.

²³¹ The automaton emerged in autobiographical passage 2 (pp. 144-150) and section 5.1 (pp. 184-192) as the antithesis of Zorbitality.

Martha's dance speaks to Carpentier's *Le Consagración de la Primavera* (1998 [1978]), a magical realist novel that seeks to reconfigure Stravinsky's *Rite* through Afro-Caribbean rhythms. The main character of the novel, Vera, asserts that the Chosen One's dance is not archaic but is rather grounded in the lived vibrancy of Afro-diasporic rhythms (see Chornik 2011). Yet, Vera does not manage to choreograph it. Martha's scene is my opportunity, since it shows how the moving female body has the power to articulate its own desires and transform in the process. Martha's memory also evokes the transformative power of Dionysus. Dionysus offers an alternative inspiration for the *Rite*, since his imaginary presence highlights the role of the collective in sustaining and propelling life. In order to evoke Dionysus in my analysis, I draw on Pavlicevic and Ansdell's (2009) work on 'collaborative musicing,' which highlights the need to go beyond the dyad in evaluating intersubjectivity.

In the second quote, Mbembe (2002) talks of African modes of self-writing and offers a vision of African subjectivity for a postcolonial age. He asserts that African subjectivity is always associated with the sacrifice of the African subject in the transatlantic slave trade. Yet, Mbembe highlights that new African subjectivities can be produced through the process of sacrifice itself. This assertion is vital for moving forward, since it denies that there is a lost African identity to be uncovered. Indeed, there is great power in the fact that African subjectivities can continually be reinvented, offering new forms of life.

Responding to this, I continue the journey I began in section 6.1, when I engaged with an imaginative Pre-Columbian narrative of the indigenous subject, by also offering a Post-Columbian narrative.²³² Mbembe's theorisations, I argue, offer a powerful metaphor for rethinking female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, since they enable us to deconstruct the female 'asexual' and to see her anew, in a sense of eternal movement.

²³² I could equally have engaged in a Pre-Columbian genealogy of the African subject, since as Van Sertima's (1976) work asserts, the Olmecs, the earliest Pre-Columbian civilisation had African roots. He suggests that African ships arrived in Mesoamerica between 700BC and 1300 AD.

In my analysis I suggest that Martha's dance reconfigures the narrative of the colonial African subject travelling to the 'New World.' The Western colonisers naturalised the dyad and devalued the configuration of West African dance: solo dance within a collective, danced in a circle. Whilst I do not wish to put forward a romanticised view of the African colonial subject, I argue that Martha's dance invokes this dancing configuration and in the process transforms the role of the sacrificial subject. Her memory shows how an initial vulnerability can transform into inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. Furthermore, she has carried the spirit of this dance into her personal life, since it now acts as a resistant imaginary. Therefore, her dance challenges a vision of the female 'asexual' as a subject of stasis and shows how vulnerability can create new configurations of identity, which have collective ecstatic motion at their core.

I will now analyse Martha's journey from vulnerability to collective ecstatic motion at a weekend art workshop:

Martha: ... She took her clothes off, wrapped herself in a sarong. Went to the centre of the circle. Got on the floor, on her knees, in a ball. She was shaking, crying. She never felt more raw, more vulnerable. Like an open wound, exposed. The music started. Small movements at first and then she could let go, little by little. Never big movements but she stood. She let go of the sarong. The group would shout stop when they wanted to draw a pose. Just 30-60 seconds, however long you could stay still. Movement became a little more free, flowed a bit more but still terrifying, exposing. Then she turned, naked. No arm gestures, no covering herself, just her. Standing with her arms by her side, just her and then "STOP" echoed from the older women down one end of the room. She felt totally naked but totally present. Truly seen.

Afterwards the love she felt from the room was overwhelming. A flower from one, a look from another. Words of encouragement from all. At the end of the day one of the women asked if she could give her the picture she drew of the real her. Just her. Standing upright, showing herself, being nothing but herself.

It was beautiful.

And still is, framed in her bedroom. A reminder of what she can do. The true, honest, whole, vulnerable, brave, strong her. (Life history interview, memory 4, 08/06/2015)

Speaking of her memory, Martha said that she felt 'honest, vulnerable, painful and free.' This description is testament to the threefold Zorbital process, characterised by a journey from vulnerability to inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. Prior to the scene in this memory, Martha experienced a lack of belief in her body. This emerged from a feeling that her creativity was 'totally blocked' and that she was unable to make a mark on the page, because of her 'judgemental' voice. Thus, Martha evoked the mind/body split, which prevents one from reaching embodied experience, as highlighted by Gillies et al. (2005). Yet, she gradually learned how to 'connect' with the materials and make art, 'in her own way,' once she felt less hemmed in by other's expectations. Martha's body also felt stuck. She watched as other people danced naked, 'comfortable to be free in their bodies, free in their movement.' Equally, she was 'overwhelmed by her partner's naked beauty, her confidence.'

Following this came the sacrificial scene that Martha narrates in her memory. This scene allows me to engage with my first stage of analysis: her reconfiguration of Stravinsky's sacrificial dance. Martha takes the courageous move to allow her body to make its mark within space. She feels completely overwhelmed as she chooses to enter the centre of the circle, wrapped in a sarong: 'She never felt more raw, more vulnerable. Like an open wound, exposed.' These are vivid images that demonstrate Martha's vulnerability, and superficially seem like the words of a sacrificial victim. Yet, as the music starts, her vulnerability begins to turn to inner ecstasy, as she makes 'small movements at first, and then she could let go, little by little.' Her movement becomes freer and freer. As she lets go of her sarong, her inner ecstasy transforms to collective ecstatic motion: 'Movement became a little more free, flowed a bit more but still terrifying, exposing.' She then turns, completely naked, with no arm gestures or anything covering her. This is 'just her.' At that moment, the older women at the end of the table shout 'STOP' to draw Martha's pose.

The combination of nakedness, movement and external acceptance creates an overall feeling of catharsis for Martha. She feels 'truly seen,' without being

objectified. Significantly, she is living in the ecstatic present, rather than a painful past or fearful future: 'She felt totally naked but totally present.' Martha dances herself to life, offering herself to others in an ethical act, whilst experiencing the positivity of recognition: 'Afterwards the love she felt from the room was overwhelming.' One woman gave her the drawing she did, which Martha described as 'beautiful.' It now hangs framed on her wall, as a reminder of 'the true, honest, whole, vulnerable, brave, strong her.' Martha emerges as a peaceful warrior woman, rather than a sacrificial virgin.

In order to show how Martha becomes this warrior woman, I wish to evoke the imagined spirit of Dionysus, which embodies a collective identity that has transformed across time and space (Storm 1998) and in particular, its power to 'transform individual identity' (Seaford 2006: 11). I achieve this by drawing on Pavlicevic and Ansdell's (2009: 257-276) concept of 'collaborative musicing.' Collaborative musicing resonates with Zorbitality as it decentres the role of the dyad in intersubjective relations and puts forward a model that works across cultures, whilst not denying local specificities. Furthermore, collaborative musicing views communication and collaboration as the basics of human affairs. Whilst Martha does not physically dance with anyone in her memory, collaborative musicing is invoked, as she experiences a sense of both losing and retaining her subjectivity within a collective. This resonates strongly with Pavlicevic and Ansdell's (*ibid*: 369) discussion of traditional African rites, as experiences that are 'multi-subjective, in the sense that we both lose and retain our subjectivity within this collective 'I.'" Martha's movement therefore finds its strongest manifestation in the connection she has with the group.

The image of Martha dancing to life offers a powerful counter-narrative to the sacrificial dance of the young 'virgin' in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, as her movement is generated from a place of vulnerability but is ultimately chosen by her, nobody else. Furthermore, Martha finally realises that her strength lies in allowing herself 'to be seen as vulnerable' by others. This awareness of vulnerability as a source of strength is a key difference between Martha's scene and Stravinsky's sacrificial dance. Furthermore, Stravinsky's dance ends with

death, while Martha's is still reverberating in her everyday life. It has enabled her to reinvent herself anew.

I will now turn to my second point of analysis, related to Martha's reconfiguration of the African colonial subject. I will seek to show how this process is central to reconceptualising female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. The key to this Zorbital analysis is the specific dancing configuration that features in Martha's memory: solo dance within a collective, danced in a circle. I argue here that this configuration evokes collective West African danced rites, which were devalued by the naturalisation of the dyad in Latin social dance in the aftermath of Western colonisation of the 'New' World (Ehrenreich 2007). In the process, Martha challenges the Western myth of origin, which asserts the racial unity of Africa and the existence of an 'asexual' subject. Her dance to life thus enables us to interrogate 'the imprisoning model of a history that is already shaped' (Mbembe 2002: 258). The collective propels her to dance in a supportive and meaningful way, which suspends time and allows her to experience transformation in all its intensity. This resonates with Pavlicevic and Ansdell's (2009: 370) words:

They [West African dancers] are not simply responsive puppets, activated separately to move collectively. All collaborate socially, musically (the two are inseparable) in a highly fluid multisubjective event that moves towards the suspending of time (as *chronos*), space, culture, age, and social status.

Martha's memory, via Mbembe's (2002) theorisations, not only allows us to reflect on the African colonial subject but also the 'asexual' as an indigenous subject of twenty-first century Western sexuality discourses. Whilst I do not want to conflate the history of the transatlantic African slave trade with the status of female (a)sexualities in the twenty-first century, there are some lessons that can be learned. As Mbembe (*ibid*: 240-242) asserts, the main issue arises in trying to integrate African subjectivity into one framework. He identifies two broad perspectives that are often used: (i) Marxist-inspired 'Afro-radicalism,' which draws on autonomy and resistance as the basis of an African identity and (ii) a nativist discourse, which reduces African identity to being part of the black race. As Mbembe highlights, the Marxist viewpoint does not

allow Africans to represent themselves, through its focus on a revolutionary sacrifice. This politics 'required the total surrender of the individual to a utopian future and to the hope of a collective resurrection' (*ibid*: 251). In this way, politics becomes 'a sacrificial process' and history an 'economy of sorcery' (*ibid*: 252). The wounded subject becomes the desired subject. Meanwhile, in the nativist discourse, Africans are believed to have an authentic and distinct culture and are encouraged to look back to lost traditions. African people are seen as a collective black body, with the presumption of a unitary black African subject.

The problematic nature of both of these positions is reflected in approaches to asexuality as an identity category in the twenty-first century. There are two options. Either a person who does not desire genital sexual relationships is fitted into a neat category of asexuality, which is supposed to have a liberating and resistant collective function, and to allow the 'asexual' subject a place within history, or the 'asexual' is viewed as an indigenous subject to the Western norm of genital sexuality.²³³ The 'asexual' in this vision emerges as an inhuman subject without a history, since s/he must adopt a coloniser's discourse to be rendered intelligible.²³⁴ Indeed, as in the case of the 'African' subject, both of these conflicting perspectives are embodied in the same person. This allows little space for viewing female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion. Yet, there are always possibilities.

Firstly, as Mbembe (*ibid*: 257) asserts, we need to 'deconstruct tradition,' so that Africa can be exposed as an invented concept in the Western imaginary. A similar approach should be applied to the 'asexual' as a figure that emerges from Western capitalist empires. Secondly, Mbembe highlights the importance of viewing Africa as 'an identity in formation' (*ibid*), much as this thesis has sought to highlight how female (a)sexualities shift across time and within

²³³ This relates to Mbembe's (2002) discussion of the African colonial body. The African body was seen as inhuman during the European Enlightenment. Yet, during the colonial era, African thinkers began to adopt Western models to form a 'narrative of liberation' (*ibid*: 249). This could be related to the emergence of the asexual movement in the twenty-first century,

²³⁴ See my respondents' memories in section 5.1 (pp. 186-191).

transformational moments. Mbembe (*ibid*: 258) ultimately concludes that this process would allow us to view the world as ‘a vast network of affinities... the essential message here is that everyone can imagine and choose what makes him or her African.’ Relating this to the study of female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality, I argue that we need to invent radical collective movement rites that break down the notion of the unitary subject, in the domains of race, class, sexual orientation, and beyond. Once we challenge the notion of a unitary subject, what comes to matter is how we choose to ‘stylize’ our lives (*ibid*: 273). Sexual identity is thus concerned with whatever movement configuration we choose to adopt. Zorbitality offers one such configuration: ecstatic solo motion within a collective.

Mbembe’s vision is conveyed in Martha’s response to her memory, since she both challenges the myth of a unitary subject and experiences transformation in the moment. Furthermore, she extends Mbembe’s musings by highlighting collective motion as the basis for her ‘self-styling’ (*ibid*: 242), which was characterised by:

Martha: ... letting go of that sense of moving in a certain way... ‘cause it was all about finding your own movement, so you move in whatever way you want, em... it felt amazingly free to be given the space to just do that and to be allowed to do it as much or as little as I wanted, and to actually be able to then dance and move... in ways that I never thought I would ever do really, em, clothed or not clothed. You know, it was just, yeah, really... powerful. (Life history interview, 08/06/2015)

Martha’s experience was all about finding her own unique style of movement: ‘letting go of that sense of moving in a certain way.’ Martha was *searching for* the origin of her movement, whilst *deconstructing it* and *performing it anew*. Indeed, what Martha experienced that day has had a knock-on effect in her personal and professional lives. She now stands up more than ever for women who do not relate to heteronormative structures. Equally, Martha and her girlfriend are considering having a child. This memory may well have set her desire in motion. Furthermore, the Zorbital research process that I instigated has *transformed* Martha, much like my me-search has transformed me:

Martha: ...It's been really powerful to actually answer these questions and to realise that I can choose it to be a different way as well. (Life history interview, 08/06/2015)

Martha's account is testament to the emergent concept of Zorbitality, where vulnerability is turned to strength through a realisation that one can continually construct oneself anew. She reaches a resistant imaginary through an internalisation of a collective spirit, thus completing the Zorbital process. Her memory embodies Mbembe's (*ibid*: 269) assertion that by 'putting to death innumerable sacrificial victims, the agent of the massacre also seeks to transcend and reinvent the self.' Indeed, by reaching a resistant imaginary, Martha shows us how we can transform the present and the past, whilst looking to a hopeful future, where we do our own dances in a propelling collective.

6.4 - Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown how collective ecstatic motion can be reached in everyday life. Along the way, a trilogy of Zorbital subjects has been invoked: the indigenous Pre-Columbian subject (section 6.1), Dionysus as an imagined collective spirit who transforms human subjectivity (section 6.2) and the colonial African subject (section 6.3). By drawing on my respondents' memories, I have sought to reconfigure these colonial narratives, so that the subjects involved are neither seen as sacrificed nor liberated. Rather, I have sought to imagine worlds, where alternative histories may be written. Through these three subjects, I have sought to re-imagine female (a)sexualities through Zorbitality. In section 6.1, I highlighted the relationship between the female 'asexual' as indigenous subject of Western sexuality discourses and the indigenous subject who is often seen as the wounded subject of Western expansion. Through my respondents' memories of collective ecstatic motion, I showed how we can peacefully stage protests through common movements. Section 6.2 highlighted that Dionysus's most important function is his role as an imagined collective spirit who transforms individual subjectivity. This synthesis was not reached in Margot's and Sasha's accounts but was exemplified in Martha's trajectory. This built to section 6.3, where I showed how a particular danced scene enabled Martha's transformation. Through her

invocation of a dance configuration similar to West African collective danced rites – solo dance within a collective, danced in a circle – I showed how she reconfigured the Sacrificial Dance of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1913), by highlighting the resistant movement of the African colonial subject. Martha's transformative process enables us to view female (a)sexualities anew through collective ecstatic motion. Ultimately, this chapter has come to the conclusion that it is in 'practices of the self' (Mbembe 2002: 269) that women gain life, beyond narratives of sacrifice or liberation. However, as my final chapter will highlight, Zorbitality does not look to a utopian future. Rather, it embodies a dance on the edge of time in an ecstatic present; an open wound of possibility, which acts as a resistant imaginary for the future.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Women dancing on the edge of time

Introduction

There is a point at which Relation is no longer expressed through a procession of trajectories, itineraries succeeding or thwarting one another, but explodes by itself and within itself, like a network, inscribed in the self-sufficient totality of the world (Glissant 1997: 195)

This thesis has navigated multiple genealogies, whilst re-imagining the history of Western colonisation of the 'New' World through the resistant power of Afro-diasporic rhythms. Yet, as Glissant's words suggest, there is a need to bring these genealogies together, so that we can make a broader comment on how Zorbitality can be harnessed in both research and everyday life. In this chapter, I firstly provide a reflection on methodology. I examine how personal narratives can transform through the research process itself, and in particular through the performative power of Afro-diasporic rhythms (see Benítez-Rojo 1996). I then consider the pivotal role of the imagination in reconfiguring histories and genealogies, and comment on the absence of the visual realm within my work. Secondly, I examine how the different chapters and three methodologies of my thesis interact. I also visualise my results through Zorbital flow diagrams, which show how visual data may be useful in making research accessible to the reader. Thirdly, I focus on Zorbitality's central role as a resistant imaginary, which appeals to Braidotti's (2006: 33) call for a sustainable nomadic ethics. I here draw on a recent piece of me-search to highlight this in practice. Finally, I consider the contribution this thesis has made to the study of female (a)sexualities, and outline some possible directions for future research and intervention in the everyday.

7.1 - A reflection on methodology



Image 3: Ruth - Freedom Woman - print: this is a print taken from a Zimbabwean stone carving. I love the power and freedom she expresses.

Transforming personal narratives through Afro-diasporic rhythms

In 1936, the African American dancer and anthropologist, Katherine Dunham, first went to the Francophone Caribbean island of Haiti, having received the Rosenfeld Research Fellowship from the University of Chicago.²³⁵ As Dunham (1969) narrates in her memoir, *Island Possessed*, her experiences in Haiti fundamentally changed her, as she was initiated into the danced West African religion, *vaudun*, and experienced the transformative power of Afro-diasporic rhythms. An awareness of this rhythmic life also fundamentally changed the way she viewed time, as she began to see it as a rounded rather than linear process, captured in her words: ‘the present diffused in the roundness of time is the way I see time and events’ (*ibid*: 46). This vision seems to reflect the ‘circularity with volume’ of Glissant’s (1997: 32) work, which I highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, as a conceptual basis for Zorbitality. This circularity looks beyond the ‘arrowlike nomadism’ (*ibid*: 18) of Western

²³⁵ In chapter 3.2, I highlighted how Dunham developed her own dance Empire, which enables us to rethink the Black Atlantic (see pp. 107-110).

colonisers, to 'circular nomadism,' (*ibid*) where uprooting can be 'experienced as a search for the Other... rather than as an expansion of territory...'

Dunham (1969) experienced the process of circular nomadism firsthand. She initially felt unenthused, as she sought to reach the spirit of the serpent god, Damballa, yet could not reach the ecstasy she desired. She wished to return home many times but then realised that the research was actually *transforming* her. Through her initiation, she experienced a sense of empathy with African slaves who had been forced to cross the Atlantic in the previous centuries: 'There we lay, scarcely breathing, waiting, listening, senses alert, packed like sardines much as the slaves who crossed the Atlantic, motionless as though chained, some of us afraid' (*ibid*: 79). Furthermore, through the ecstatic danced rites she participated in during her *vaudun* initiation, she reached what could be described as Zorbitality. By internalising a collective spirit, personal ecstasy became the basis of a transformative power:

We danced, not as people dance in the hounfor,²³⁶ with the stress of possession or the escapism of hypnosis or for catharsis, but as I imagine dance must have been executed when body and being were more united, when form and flow and personal ecstasy became an exaltation of a superior state of things, not necessarily a ritual to any one superior being (*ibid*: 109).

Dunham realised that the relationship between the imagined divinity and devotee's dance in the *vaudun* tradition reflected the symbology of the black peoples of the world. In particular, she noted the fluid movements of the *yonvalou*, a type of ecstatic movement that enabled Dunham to feel 'sublimely free because I was experiencing the ecstasy without being taken over, "mounted," or possessed' (*ibid*: 136). Dunham thus offered an alternative vision to the history of Western colonisation, which had been based on the forceful possession of other cultures and traditions. Rather, her vision highlighted how we can peacefully coexist whilst experiencing personal transformation through a culture's rhythmic life. Indeed, in her discussion of the Carnival tradition, Dunham noted how the crowd itself propelled the dance, resulting 'not necessarily with an end in consummation' (*ibid*: 222). Rather, sexuality was

²³⁶ A hounfor is a *vaudun* temple.

generated 'from collective, concerted, uninterrupted central body rhythm in motion' (*ibid*: 229). This resonates with my assertion throughout this thesis that collective ecstasy is asexual, and should be drawn on as the basis of a transformative feminine libidinal economy for the twenty-first century.

Dunham's account resonates with mine. In September 2013, I received ESRC funding to undertake this doctoral research. Like Dunham's initiation, this thesis has been a voyage of discovery for me, where I have danced around heteronormative structures. Yet, as in Dunham's trajectory, I was not naïve. I was fully aware of the emotional challenges I was going to face undertaking it, due to its incredibly personal nature, and also my fear of verbally articulating my relationship with it to others. This primary vulnerability would begin a process, where my view of my (a)sexuality would fundamentally change through *the research process itself*. Through my experiences, I would gradually realise that I needed to re-write research methodology, so that I could engage in a radical overhaul of the philosophy of culture.

Initially, I could not cope with the vulnerability I felt as I researched this topic, whilst dealing with people's misperceptions about asexuality in my everyday life and simultaneously questioning my positioning as an 'asexual.'²³⁷ This led to a breakdown right before my trip to Puerto Rico in November 2014. I honestly thought I was going to give up my research; it was just too painful. Yet, like Dunham, the most significant transformations in my subjectivity took place both through ecstatic movement to Afro-diasporic rhythms in Zumba and specific transformative moments in the Caribbean (Puerto Rico, 2014 and Cuba, 2016).²³⁸ My experiences in Puerto Rico transformed me in a moment that I still remember every day, since it challenged all that had gone before. My experiences set off a process where I realised that I needed to integrate my poetic voice into my work, and also signalled my arrival at autoeroticism as a significant aspect of my (a)sexuality. My experiences in Cuba, meanwhile,

²³⁷ I am aware that I discussed my personal journey in the introduction to chapter 4 (see pp. 139-143) but I discuss it again here as a self-reflexive practice.

²³⁸ See autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (pp. 154-162) and autobiographical passage 9 (pp. 174-177).

demonstrated how the internalisation of Zumba's collective spirit acts as a resistant imaginary, which evokes the configuration of solo dance within a collective, common in West African danced rites.

Around the time of my arrival at autoeroticism, I performed my poetry at the *Talking Bodies* conference in Chester (March 2015), which sought to evoke the female 'asexual,' whilst challenging the univocal representation of asexuality within culture. I also contributed to an article titled: 'Self-reflective study: the rise of "me-search" (Rees 2015), in the Times Higher Education magazine, in which I spoke of my shifting relationship with (a)sexuality. At this point I was beginning to move away from asexuality as a personal marker. Yet, even in this piece I failed to mention Zumba as a significant aspect of my life and work. Perhaps my refusal to believe in the methodological value of collective ecstasy was conditioned by the static image of 'the researcher' I had internalised, sitting at a desk with a furrowed brow. Indeed, this image defied the sense of ecstatic motion that I had begun to see as the fundamental starting point for my libidinal life.

In October 2015, my own 'New World' colonisation was fully opened up, as I realised what a deconstruction of Latin social dances hid: the naturalisation of the dyadic formation, and the devaluing of the collective traditions of Pre-Columbian populations, West African slaves and the Dionysian strand of collective ecstasy in the Western tradition. I also became very aware of the need to reconfigure genealogies so that alternative histories - sociocultural, personal and collective - could be made possible. This serves to highlight that transgressive possibilities exist in the rhythmic cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America, even if their largely heteropatriarchal societal structures, reflected in the dyadic structure of their dance forms, do not quite match up to their rhythmic vibrancy. By becoming a Zumba teacher, one could argue that I became a devotee of Dionysus and Damballa and moved away from the internalised female 'asexual' I once had been, which had made me feel like an indigenous subject of Western sexuality discourses, forced to use a coloniser's language. Furthermore, a large part of my personal journey has been realising

that sexual orientation categories are actually products of patriarchy and capitalism. These findings were the basis of my concept of Zorbitality. As this research process has shown, transformation is neither a process of sacrifice nor liberation but is rather a matter of being able to suspend any threats to one's vulnerability through collective ecstatic motion. Furthermore, as I will now describe, the imagination is key to this process.

The role of the imagination and the absence of the visual

Imaginative processes were central to my reconfiguration of the genealogies and histories presented in this thesis. This approach was influenced by recent research in the social sciences (Wright Mills 1959; Denzin 1997; Keightley and Pickering 2012; Levitas 2013), feminist utopias (Piercy 1979 [1976]), as well as the multi-faceted genealogies of Latin American feminists (Anzaldúa 1999) and long-established Latin American literary traditions (Carpentier 1995 [1949]). I drew on imaginative processes both in chapter 3 (alternative genealogies) and in my re-configuration of my respondents' memories through resistance in chapters 5 and 6. These processes were a vital part of my analysis, since I sought to imagine more ethical worlds for *all* human beings. Indeed, a crucial link between these sections is the role of cultural symbols in narratives, which can become the basis for new historical trajectories. For instance: the ship emerged as a symbol both of colonisation *and* women's agency in Woolf's (2009 [1915]) *The Voyage Out*, as I described in section 3.1 (see pp. 92-97). This was subsequently reflected in Kali's passage from India to the UK in chapter 6 (see pp. 234-236).

It could be argued that it was unethical to re-write my respondents' memories using my own imaginative processes, especially as I was drawing on Ellis's (2007) relational ethics, which views the relationship between the researcher and the researched as collaborative. Indeed, the collaborative rewriting of memories is seen as an important reflexive practice in collective biography (see Davies and Gannon 2006). However, there was a method in my madness. Firstly, the fact that I re-imagined others' memories speaks volumes of the capitalist society we live in, whereby we work longer hours and have less time

available for personal processes. I did not want to burden my participants with too many duties. What I wish to highlight, however, is that the light-hearted spirit of our discussions made me consider what my respondents might have wanted. Secondly, the alternative genealogies I set out in chapter 3 acted as firing points for those I evoked in the re-imagining of my respondents' memories. Thirdly, the alternative configurations I offered were only *one* possible version. Indeed, the Zorbital rewriting of memories in this thesis could be drawn upon as a useful critical intervention and educational tool in future research, which could see multiple re-imaginings of the same memories.

A notable absence in my research was the usage of visual imagery. As I mentioned in section 1.4 (see pp. 36-37), I had initially set out for the visual to play a much more prominent role. The use of visual methodologies within qualitative research has previously highlighted elements of everyday experience that elude verbal description (see Gillies et al. 2005; del Busso 2011). However, my respondents engaged more with the writing of their memories. Firstly, this is perhaps to do with the role of the imagination, which has been so central to the process of this thesis. In memories, the visual is implied rather than explicitly stated. One can visualise a scene happening but is also free to imagine alternative scenarios. A visual image is more univocal than that. It could be argued that the visual realm is so stifling within patriarchal cultures, and especially with the advent of 'the selfie' in twenty-first century culture (see Re, Wang, He and Rule 2016), that women seek other methods for expressing themselves, when given the opportunity. Secondly, the lack of engagement may have a relationship with the form the visual activity took. Receptive methods such as photo-elicitation²³⁹ can play a valuable role in stimulating memory (Reavey 2011), whilst photo-production²⁴⁰ is useful for exploring selfhood and identity (Gillies et al. 2005). Whilst I drew on photo-production within my study, I would perhaps suggest that the prompt of 'images of self, gender and sexuality in everyday life' was too vague. The memories

²³⁹ Photo-elicitation refers to the use of photos to stimulate discussion within a narrative interview.

²⁴⁰ For example: self-portraits or photographs produced by participants.

offered more pointed examples, where the emphasis was removed from sexuality itself to experiences within the body.²⁴¹ This point resonates with my emergent concept of Zorbitality, which decentres sexuality as the starting point of women's libidinal lives. However, as I will demonstrate through Zorbital flow diagrams at the end of the next section (see pp. 267-272), visual representations of data can aid in creating a connection between the reader and the process observed (see Brown and Reavey 2015). In order to presage this, I will navigate the connection between chapters, methodologies and Zorbital processes.

7.2 - Navigating the links between chapters, methodologies, and Zorbital processes

This thesis has posed questions related to the junctures and disjunctures between discursive representations of female (a)sexualities and women's lived experiences of (a)sexualities across their life spans, and has navigated the embodied moments in which female (a)sexualities are in transition. Ultimately, collective ecstatic motion has emerged as the missing element in twenty-first century Western culture, which has a complex relationship with the suppression of other cultural traditions. Yet, I have asserted that vulnerability can be turned to strength through women's collective ecstatic motion, which can be harnessed as a feminine libidinal economy that embodies an ethical openness to otherness.

Chapter 2 addressed these concerns, by engaging in a micro-genealogy of female (a)sexualities, and seeking to reconfigure dominant cultural narratives through movement. This chapter showed that empirical psychological representations of asexuality reduce the 'asexual' to an indigenous 'Other' within Western sexuality discourses, due to their predominantly genital focus. The 'asexual' thus becomes a subject of stasis on the stages of Western civilisation (section 2.1, p. 53). These themes were also reflected in dominant cultural representations of female (a)sexualities (section 2.3, pp. 80-88), where

²⁴¹ See p. 33 for details of the memory prompts.

referents of the female 'asexual' - the frigid woman of psychoanalysis and the single woman of postfeminist culture - are reduced to static subjects, by virtue of men's fears of their ecstatic movement. The key points of sections 2.1 and 2.3 were echoed in the accounts of my collective biography respondents in chapter 5. For instance, in section 5.1 (see pp. 186-191), three asexual-identified women were reduced to automatons, even though this contradicted the ecstatic movement evident within their accounts.

Section 2.2 deconstructed representations of asexuality, by engaging in a genealogy of the terms sex, gender and sexuality (section 2.2, pp. 61-80). This section highlighted that we need to see these terms as processes that can evolve across time and in specific moments of becoming, as reflected in the history of Latin American music and dance (section 3.3, pp. 112-119). Furthermore, I highlighted an ecstatic strand in female (a)sexualities by focusing on female autoeroticism as a distinctive libidinal economy. These possibilities were echoed both in my me-search in chapter 4 and the collective biography work in chapter 5. In section 5.3 (see pp. 199-211), I highlighted how vulnerability may be turned to inner ecstasy through Zorbitality's erotic poles - autoeroticism and polyamory - which decentralise the dyad as a basis of intersubjective relations. Meanwhile, section 5.4 (see pp. 211-220) showed how inner ecstasy is reached in transformative moments where subjectivities dance and the linear life trajectory is forgotten. This was reflected in my account in autobiographical passages 4 and 5 (pp. 154-162), which recounted a moment that fundamentally changed how I viewed my (a)sexuality.

Chapter 3 highlighted the powerful role of the imagination in reconfiguring genealogies. This chapter staged an alternative genealogy by drawing on various sources: literature, the history of Western and Latin American dance and the twenty-first century Dionysian rite of Zumba. The Zorbital framework of this thesis organically evolved from these sources. Whilst the literary sources demonstrated the possibility of viewing female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion, in the history of Western dance, the female 'asexual' is seen as a vulnerable subject. By drawing on Stravinsky's (1913) ballet, *The Rite of Spring*,

where the Chosen Virgin dances herself to death and Dunham's reconfiguration of the *Rite* in *Rites de Passage* (1941), I sought to show how negative representations of female (a)sexualities can be challenged through women's resistant choreographies, using Afro-diasporic rhythms. I contextualised this in sections 3.3 and 3.4 (pp. 112-119 and pp. 119-135), by showing how the 'colonial wound' (Mignolo 2005: 8), wrought by Western colonisation of the 'New' World was turned to inner ecstasy through the generative possibilities of merging musical and danced traditions: indigenous, European and African. I extended this Zorbital journey through my evocation of Zumba as a deconstruction of Latin social dance, mediated by capitalism and globalisation. The internalisation of its collective spirit, both an embodiment of West African danced rites and Dionysus's spirit, was highlighted in my me-search (autobiographical passage 9, pp. 174-177). Furthermore, I drew on this collective spirit to reconfigure Katherine's Latin dance floor scene in section 5.2 (pp. 192-199), which allowed us to think of how we may stage more ethical worlds for *all* human beings. This also addressed my criticisms of queer approaches to (a)sexualities in section 2.1 (pp. 58-60), where I argued that they feature a lack of coordinated movement, not only in a political sense, but also in terms of resistant physical choreographies.

I reinforced the connection between women's resistant choreographies and the Western colonisation of Latin America in chapter 6, where I reconfigured various colonial narratives through the collective ecstatic motion evident in my respondents' memories. The three figures that emerged were the indigenous Pre-Columbian subject (section 6.1, pp. 226-238), Dionysus as the crucial link between the demise of collective ecstasy in both Western and Latin American danced traditions (section 6.2, pp. 238-246) and the colonial African subject (section 6.3, pp. 246-254). I also restaged the final scene of Stravinsky's sacrificial dance, which I previously evoked in section 3.2 (pp. 103-110), through Martha's danced scene (section 6.3, pp. 246-254). Martha's scene highlighted the configuration of solo circle dance within a collective, which is common within West African circle dance. It also worked through a specific Zorbital journey via vulnerability, inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion,

and the internalisation of a transformative collective spirit as a resistant imaginary. By drawing on Mbembe's (2002) work on African self-writing, I rewrote the colonial narrative of the African subject in terms of a resistant 'self-styling' (Mbembe 2002: 242), whilst showing how this can be used as the basis of a new feminine libidinal economy, grounded in collective ecstatic motion.

I also wish to comment on the interconnected nature of my three methodologies: rhizomatic/serpentine genealogy (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]; Anzaldúa 1999), me-search (Nguyen 2015) and collective biography (Davies and Gannon 2006). They act as a triad that collaboratively demonstrate how the sociohistorical, personal and collective are thoroughly imbued in the imaginative re-enactment of various histories. Furthermore, their interaction has shown how each strand of the threefold Zorbital process - vulnerability, inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion - is separate but overlapping. In the genealogies, chapter 2 placed the female 'asexual' in a position of vulnerability. Yet, chapter 3 showed how vulnerability may turn to inner ecstasy and collective ecstatic motion. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 offered micro-genealogies of the threefold Zorbital process. Meanwhile, sections 3.3 and 3.4 together staged a journey from the vulnerability of the colonial encounter in the 'New' World, which quashed collective ecstasy, to Zumba as a return to this tradition in the twenty-first century. The threefold Zorbital process organically emerged in my me-search (chapter 4) and the collective biography (chapters 5 and 6), both in the content of my memories *and* the transformative process of the research.

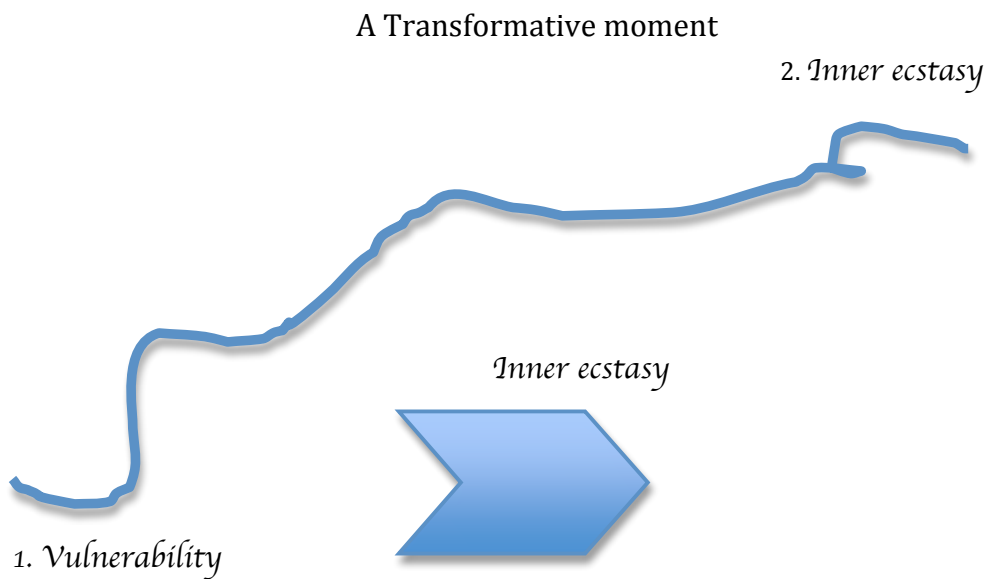
The interaction of my methodologies served to demonstrate the variety of flows that Zorbital processes can take. Extending this, I will here illustrate five flow of intensities for the Zorbital process, in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]) rhizomatic illustrations.²⁴² Commenting on Deleuze and Guattari's visualisations, Brown and Reavey (2015: 212) remark that the role of diagrams 'is to offer a means for the analysis to be experienced by others, to be directly related to life, such that potential common notions can be surfaced.' Since

²⁴² Other influences for these diagrams are Reading's (2016: 56-57) six trajectories of the global memory field and Van Anders's (2015: 1191-1198) Sexual Configuration diagrams.

Zorbitality is also a practical politics of the *everyday*, the following diagrams reflect this vision. I will contextualise each Zorbital flow by demonstrating how Zorbital processes were evoked across all three methodologies. I will highlight how the strongest manifestation of Zorbitality occurs when one navigates a painful journey from a primary vulnerability to the internalisation of a collective ecstatic spirit as a resistant imaginary. Yet, partial Zorbital processes can be enacted, which offer generative possibilities.

Zorbital Flows

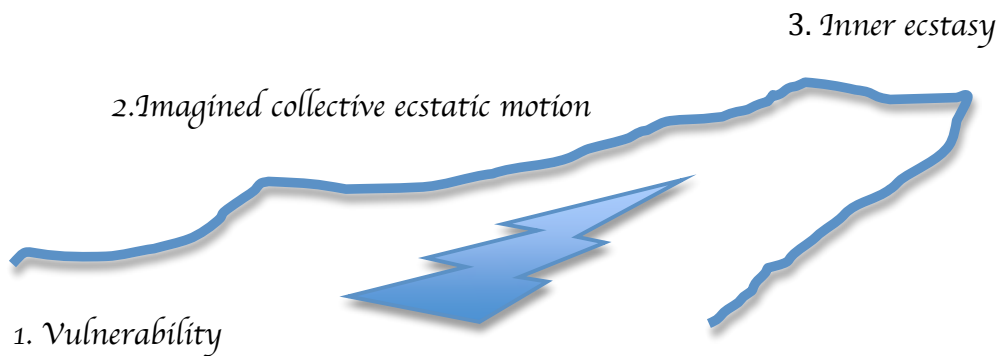
The first Zorbital flow I wish to illustrate is the transformative moment (see Zorbital flow 1, p. 268). In this configuration, one experiences a transition from vulnerability to inner ecstasy. The collective is not necessarily evoked, but rather one's subjectivity dances in a moment that defies one's previous life trajectory. This is evidenced in the history of Western colonisation of the 'New' World, where the colonial wound transformed into inner ecstasy via the merging of European, African and indigenous musical traditions (see section 3.3, pp. 114-117). In my me-search it occurred in a moment where I forgot the internalised 'asexual' subject I had thought of myself as (autobiographical passage 4, pp. 155-157). Finally, it was evidenced in Anna's memory in section 5.4 (see pp. 212-217), when she reached a pre-verbal state and the boundaries forged by 'identity' were erased. As can be seen in Zorbital Flow 1, a transformative moment marks an ecstatic shift from vulnerability to inner ecstasy. The line between them flows and does not have an ending point. This suggests that such moments are ambivalent, yet may reverberate much later, when one reaches a deeper invocation of the collective.

Zorbital Flow 1:

Zorbital Flows 2 and 3 offer partial Zorbital processes (see pp. 269-270). Zorbital Flow 2 (see p. 269) shows that even in moments of vulnerability, where it seems like inner ecstasy is impossible, it can be evoked through *imagining* choreographed resistant movements within one's collective. This was evidenced in the work of Katherine Dunham in section 3.2 (see pp. 107-110). Dunham created her own dance empire through the imaginative possibilities of Afro-diasporic rhythms. Furthermore, it was evidenced in Katherine's memory in section 5.2 (see pp. 192-199), where I re-imagined her Latin dance floor scene in terms of queer dance floor spaces and Mexican *conchero* dance. As Zorbital Flow 2 shows, the journey from vulnerability to inner ecstasy via *imagined* collective ecstatic motion is an ascending process. Yet, unless the inner ecstasy generated is continually remembered, then it will have little effect. Rather, in order for this experience of inner ecstasy to be strengthened, one should *physically* engage with the collective movement rite and internalise its spirit. Zorbital Flow 2 thus offers a subtle echoing point for the full Zorbital process in Zorbital Flow 5.

Zorbital Flow 2:

Partial Zorbital Process (i)

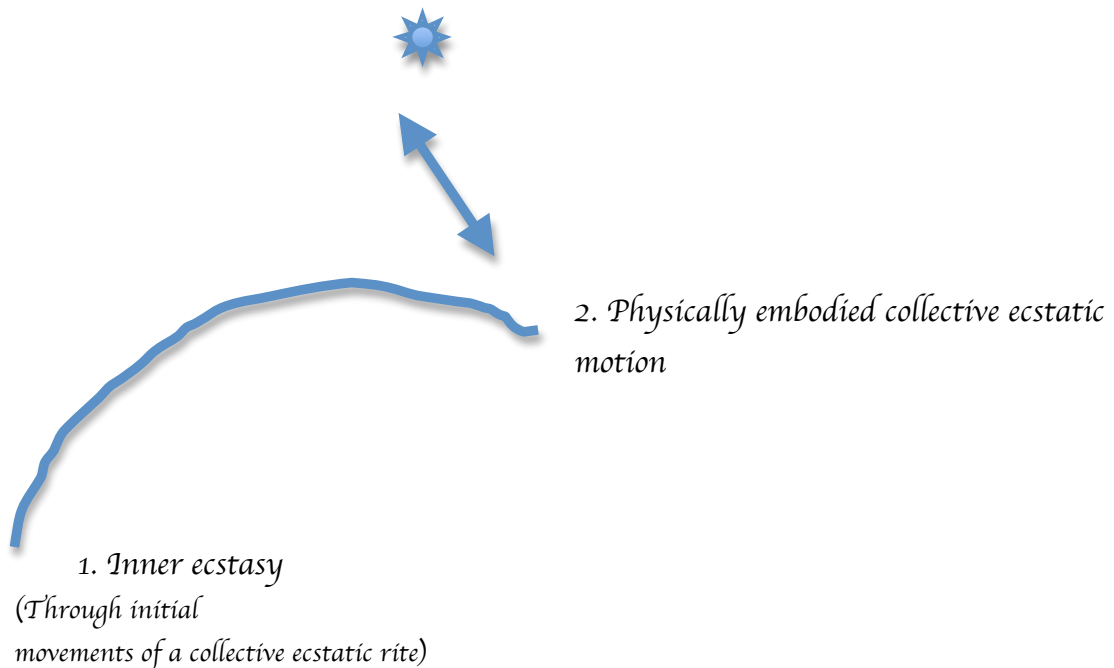


Zorbital flow 3 (see p. 270) shows that one may launch immediately into inner ecstasy through the initial movements of collective ecstatic motion, without going through vulnerability. This was evidenced in my me-search (autobiographical passage 8, pp. 170-171), when I found joy in movement itself, without it being integrated into my everyday experience. This also surfaced in my respondents' memories of collective movement rites in section 6.1 (see pp. 228-238). As Zorbital Flow 3 demonstrates, the inner ecstasy generated from the initial physical movements of a collective ecstatic rite traverses a smooth arc. This differs considerably from the purely *imagined* experience of engaging in co-ordinated collective movement, since physical collective ecstatic motion is a direct and embodied resistance that has strong implications for the everyday. As Zorbital Flow 3 illustrates, a resistant imaginary may be possible, if one is aware of the resistant power of the movements being engaged in.

Zorbital Flow 3:

Partial Zorbital Process (ii)

[Resistant Imaginary exists as a possibility]

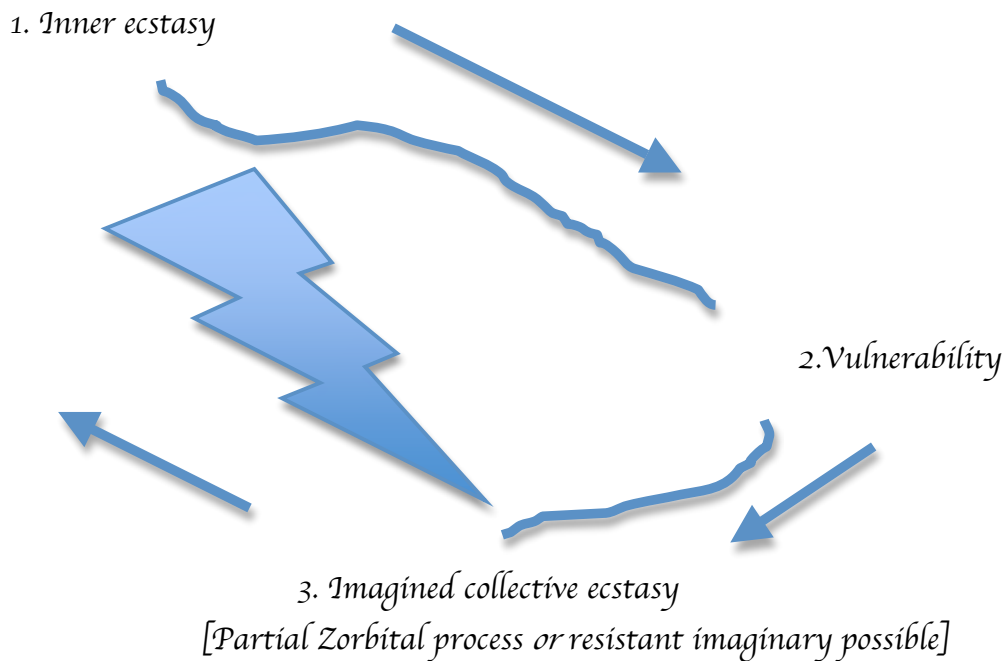


The fourth Zorbital flow I offer here is the Reverse Zorbital Process, whereby one may begin from a position of inner ecstasy but may experience a shift to vulnerability when positive self-perceptions do not match up to negative societal portrayals. As Zorbital Flow 4 illustrates (see p. 271), this embodies a rapid descent. This was evidenced in chapter 3, when I initially described the collective ecstasy of Dionysian rites before showing how the rise of Christianity and Western expansion turned this to a primary vulnerability, through the destruction of the collective traditions of various cultures. In my me-search, this was evidenced when I was enjoying a night out with my male friends, only for a lecherous oaf to ask them: ‘can I sleep with your woman?’ (autobiographical passage 3, pp. 151-154), thus reducing me to an object of exchange. Furthermore, the accounts of the three queer/asexual-identified women in section 5.1 (see pp. 186-191) highlighted how they were reduced to subjects of stasis, even though this contradicted the ecstatic movement evident in their coming to asexuality. Yet, through an imagining of coordinated collective ecstatic motion, one may reach a partial Zorbital process. As Zorbital

flow 4 shows, whilst a rapid descent occurs following the transition from inner ecstasy to vulnerability, an ascent occurs through the imagining of collective ecstatic motion. Therefore, the image of the lightning bolt forms part of the flow. If one has previously engaged in a collective movement rite and internalised its spirit, one may even reach a resistant imaginary.

Zorbital Flow 4:

Reverse Zorbital Process

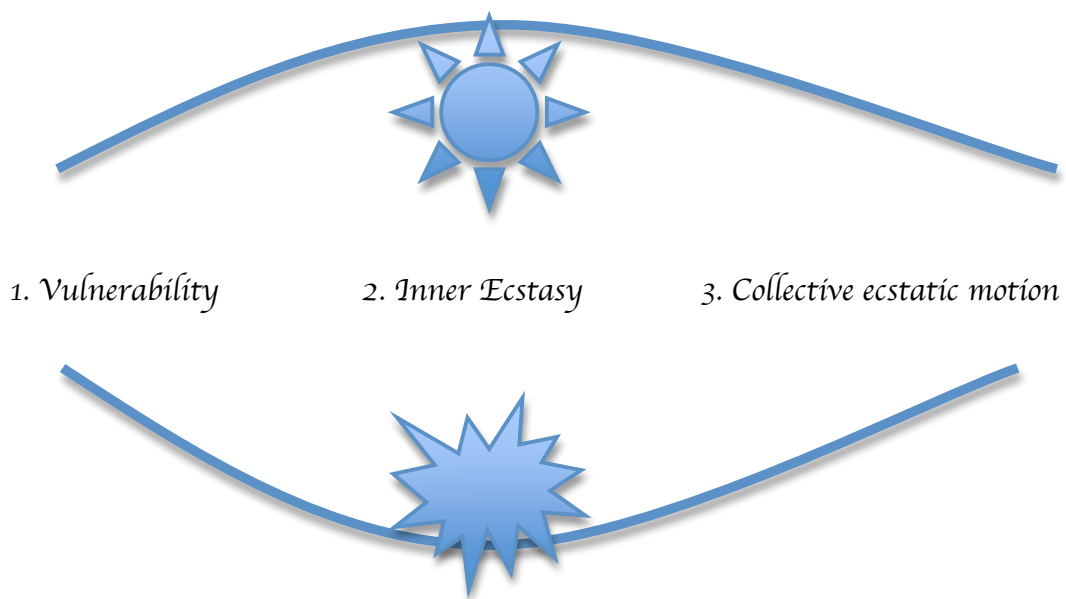


The fifth Zorbital flow is a resistant imaginary (transformative Zorbital process) [see p. 272]. In this flow, one may experience a *primary* vulnerability, where one may be faced with a deep-rooted trauma from one's past, within the present. Yet, by imagining oneself engaging in a collective movement rite, one may reach inner ecstasy. By *engaging* in these rites with one's collective and continually reimagining them in moments of vulnerability, one can reach a resistant imaginary. This was evidenced in Piercy's (1979 [1976]) *Woman on the Edge of Time* (section 3.1, pp. 98-102), where the internalised collective spirit of Mattapoissett called Connie to action. It also emerged in my me-search (autobiographical passage 9, pp. 174-177), where I turned a raw vulnerability to strength through dancing Zumba in solitude, whilst thinking of all Zumba communities around the world. Finally, it surfaced in Martha's memory

(section 6.3, pp. 246-254), where she reconfigured the history of the African colonial subject through the specific danced configuration of solo circle dance within a collective, whilst reconfiguring female (a)sexualities through collective ecstatic motion. As Zorbital flow 5 shows, these can be seen as transformative Zorbital processes, which embody an ever-flowing arc. Whilst there may be peaks and troughs, transformative Zorbital processes are smooth, invoking the image of the sun rising and setting. The moment when a resistant imaginary is reached is akin to an explosion at the level of subjectivity, which enables one to survive, through a climax within a flow. Even if one returns to a position of vulnerability, the collective can always be reached through physical and imaginative engagement.

Zorbital Flow 5:

A Resistant Imaginary (Transformative Zorbital process)



RESISTANT IMAGINARY

These five Zorbital configurations suggest that processes are fragmented and overlapping rather than linear, much like the relationship between methodologies in this thesis. Yet, by internalising the spirit of collective ecstatic motion, we can continually transform and sustain ourselves in moments of

vulnerability. I call this a 'resistant imaginary,' which will be the basis of the following piece of me-search, which recounts recent shifts in my trajectory.

7.3 - Zorbitality as a resistant imaginary

In the latter stages of this research, I began some partnered romantic and sexual exploration with a man. On the first occasion, everything was fresh and new. He invited me to his place to lend me a copy of Thomas Mann's (1928 [1912]) *Death In Venice*, and things just organically unfolded from there. It was unexpected. I did not feel the pressure that things needed to lead to their assumed consummation (i.e. – penetrative sex). The second time I felt that it was being expected of me, but that I could get away with not doing it. The third time, I knew he wanted penetrative sex, and I felt vulnerable and unsafe. My response was to get up and leave. Yet, my fear of articulating my boundaries led me to feel colonised and trapped. Where would this lead? Was I bound to him? I felt a 'forced sexual service' (Wittig 1992 [1976]: 7) being imposed on me, as well as the constraints of the monogamous couple norm. I ran through a labyrinth in my mind, desiring nothing but a way out.²⁴³

Curiosity led me to these experiences. Yet, I escaped through powerful acts, which defied verbal articulation. When thinking of my initial inability to verbally articulate my boundaries, I was reminded of Cixous's (1976 [1975]) work, which highlighted how phallogocentric regimes stifle women's speech. Yet, through writing and more poignantly through embodied collective movement, we can begin to challenge this. The following message that I sent to my new partner after our third meeting could therefore be described as my 'message from the edge.'

Autobiographical passage: Message from the edge - 19/08/2016

I need to send this message, as I find it hard to talk about things sometimes. I just feel like things are moving too fast with us. The main thing is that I don't want to have sex with anybody at this point of my life. So don't take my recoil as a rejection of you. Maybe I would be

²⁴³ Indeed, I started to think of my favourite mythical creature, the unicorn, who has a horn but chooses not to penetrate others with it.

interested in sex over time but just not right at the beginning. I needed to tell you this because I don't want to hurt you. And I also want to be able to feel safe, and to know that I've made my boundaries clear. Obviously I would like to see you again, as I feel a sense of connection with you. But if the sexual aspect of the relationship is going to be a problem, then it probably won't work. And the monogamous couple paradigm does make me feel very hemmed in. Again, I'm sorry I couldn't articulate this verbally.

In this message, I let my partner know that things were 'moving too fast' for me, that I did not want sex²⁴⁴ with anybody at this point of my life but it may happen 'over time.' I expressed that I did not want to 'hurt' him but that I needed to feel 'safe.' I also said that I felt 'hemmed in' by the couple paradigm. Looking back on what I wrote, it is fitting that I unconsciously drew on images of movement in attempting to convey the prohibitions that were being put on my body. There was also a temporal element, which highlighted how my embodied present was either being challenged with too much movement ('too fast') or else with a stifling of movement ('hemmed in'). Yet, my possibility lay on the edge of time, where 'change' was on the horizons.

It is significant that my call to action occurred in the midst of two events. Firstly, the night prior to sending this message, I attended my friend's queer 30th birthday ball on the River Thames. Secondly, I was in the process of arranging a 'Zumba in the park' event with my Zumba 'chickenz,'²⁴⁵ thus spreading collective joy into the everyday. Whilst the couple dancing paradigm was the main focus at my friend's party, and I mainly watched, I was happy to. What I saw before me was glorious: the ball was billed as 'gender queer,' so many of the attendees did not hold the boundaries of sex and gender in place. I rejoiced because this was about people dancing with each other for the joy of dancing itself. As they spun around the dance floor, in sailor outfits or sequined evening coats, I felt a sense of inner ecstasy. I did not feel compelled to dance because I just wanted to do my own ecstatic one. This highlights the fact that

²⁴⁴ Meaning the dominant heterosexual narrative of penile-vaginal penetration.

²⁴⁵ This is my affectionate name for my class attendees, which stems from my nickname 'Gallina' (Chicken). This is because my favourite Zumba moves resemble the movements of a chicken.

we need to offer alternative configurations for human relationships in the twenty-first century, even within queer circles.

The next morning I sent the message to my partner. As I clicked 'send' and waited for a bomb to drop,²⁴⁶ I went to teach my Zumba class. Dancing ecstatically with my Zumba friends enabled me to transcend my worries. I nervously opened my Facebook account in the afternoon. My partner was respectful but the lack of sex was going to be an issue for him. I respected this but was happy I had articulated how I felt. Penetrative sex at this moment in my life would have felt 'like rape,' I wrote, as it was not something I actively wanted. Indeed, it would have deeply violated me. Of course, I did not tell him that I find my libidinal fulfilment in autoeroticism and the Zorbital flow of Zumba. Yet, I had to speak in this coloniser's language to get my point across. Nevertheless, I was glad I had put myself in that initial position of vulnerability and went with the flow for my three-week experiment with coupledness. Indeed, it had enacted a sense of inner ecstasy and a realisation that things really can change *within a moment* and *over time*. Furthermore, it had highlighted what I really desired: collective ecstatic motion. I did not feel rejected, because I am a woman defined by movement, not the stasis of the dyad.

On 30 August, 2016, soon after this exchange, the day arrived for Zumba in the park with my Zumba chickenz, some of whom I count as my best friends. We are a varied mix of people: from Europe, the US and Latin America. Yet, our sense of collective joy unites us. That day was gloriously sunny. The music pulsed and as we warmed up, I felt the connection I always do with these people. Our collective joy unites and sustains us, as does the spirit of Zumba 'Gallina,' the Chicken Zumba spirit, which I see as my unique Zorbital configuration.²⁴⁷ Bystanders stood and watched, but did not join in. Yet, I hope

²⁴⁶ A similar bomb was dropped by Scarlett in section 5.3 (see p. 205) when she sent a letter to her family, saying she was a lesbian!

²⁴⁷ This spirit encapsulates Deleuze and Guattari's (2004 [1980]: 256-300) concept of 'becoming-animal,' which relates to a central question: 'How can we conceive of a peopling, a propagation, a becoming that is without filiation or hereditary production? A multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor?' (*ibid*: 266). I share this nonfilial spirit any time I dance with my Zumba chickenz.

they will in the future. Once we get rid of rigid ways of thinking and moving, we will all dance within a collective that extends to our spirits. Furthermore, we will internalise this spirit as a resistant imaginary, which can sustain us in moments of vulnerability.

Zorbitality, as a resistant imaginary, resonates with the 'sustainable nomadic ethics' that Braidotti (2006: 33) calls for, since it surpasses the static flows of capitalist enterprises and the commodification of desire. Zumba, as a central example, spreads global happiness in local networks. For instance: Jutta tells me each week that my classes make her 'so happy' and Radika told me that 'your classes helped me get through my PhD.' Moreover, Zumba has sustained me throughout this research process *and* in that moment where I wrote my 'message from the edge.' Having arrived at Zorbitality as a conceptual and analytic mode, I feel a sense of comfort, as I know I will always hold the spirit of Zumba within me, whether I dance it or not. Furthermore, I have become empowered to sustain shifts in my trajectory. When I Zumba, my (a)sexuality does not enter my mind. In fact, it holds absolutely no relevance.

Zorbitality's role as a resistant imaginary addresses Butler's (2004: 26) question of how individuals who stand outside heteronormative structures may find 'endurable ties' in a world where they do not fit. At the heart of a resistant imaginary is the relationship between life and death. If we begin to queer what it means to be human, so that female (a)sexualities are not viewed in terms of a static death dance but rather an ecstatic dance of agency, then we can begin this work. Indeed, we need to look to a new collective consciousness that both celebrates ambiguity and challenges the rigidity of Western thought, as in Anzaldúa's (1999: 99-113) concept of a new *mestiza* consciousness. Indeed, as the emergent concept of Zorbitality proposes, a 'continual creative motion' (*ibid*: 102) can be found in collective ecstatic motion, which enables us to go beyond binaries that would otherwise divide us.

How then might we reach this resistant imaginary in the everyday? When discussing the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1992) in chapter 3, I highlighted that

we need to each find a flow activity, which allows us to transcend rigid societal structures. The discovery of this activity may happen completely by chance. Yet, when you find it, continue it, enjoy it, direct your attention to your goal and then circumvent it, you have almost reached a Zorbital synthesis. By integrating the joy of the experience into your life, you have got there. Reaching a resistant imaginary is vital for women, as we still live within a patriarchal world, defined by heteronormative structures. Zorbitality, as I have shown, looks towards a renewed female collectivity, where the category of woman is itself seen as a dancing process (Riley 1987). Yet, the process of achieving this has a universal synthesis, which has the good of the human at its core.

7.4 - And for the future

In the introduction to this thesis, I invoked Piercy's (1979 [1976] feminist utopia, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, as a powerful inspiration for my work. Piercy succeeds in conveying a futurist society, Mattapoissett, where differences in gender, sexuality, race and class play little part in everyday life. Rather, she looks to a sustainable future where a broader range of subjectivities may be allowed for women and for all human beings. Piercy situated her futurist utopia in the year 2137. Yet, I have sought to answer her call in 2016.

My research has made a valuable contribution to the philosophy of culture. To my knowledge, no study has previously engaged in such an all-encompassing critique of the societal structures and histories that have constrained female ecstatic motion and thought. My work has imaginatively rewritten genealogies and memories using movement as a fundamental strategy of resistance. This thesis thus offers hope for future research on women's embodied experiences of (a)sexualities. It shows how speaking about the intricate details of our memories is vital to our process of remembering, as is our right to re-imagine memories.

Zorbitality as a conceptual framework shows how 'difference must be opposed by a thematics of sameness' (Mbembe 2002: 258). This is essential for enabling

a renewed female collectivity in the twenty-first century, so that a broader range of female subjectivities may be allowed, within a new tradition that values collective ecstatic motion. Yet, as I have argued, this vision should celebrate each woman's individual style of movement, recognising that it may shift across time and in situated moments of becoming. Twenty-first century feminism is far from embracing such a vision, since, as Penny (2014, 2016) succinctly argues, it is concealed largely within the rhetoric of sexual liberation. Whilst 'global capitalism may be at the origin of the tragedy' (Mbembe 2002: 257), whether speaking of colonial history or the commodification of human desires, it is time for things to change.

My vision for the future is not utopian, since we need to ground resistance in *everyday practices*. Ideally, a 'coordinated collective action' (Guardiola-Rivera 2010: 371) would wipe capitalism out, but perhaps the best we can do in this time and place is to utilise capitalist resources and to slowly subvert them. I experience this every month when I receive my latest Zumba choreography in the post. I have bought into the Zumba brand, yet have not been consumed by it. Instead, I draw on the resources that capitalism offers me and try and make the world a better place. In all our collective movement rites, we need to be aware of the importance of connecting local groups to global networks, through a product that spreads universal happiness.

Finally, we need to continue writing creatively and collaboratively within research. As my own work has shown, this poses particular challenges. The main issue, as identified by Denzin (1997), is maintaining a balance between critique and poetry, whilst creating a multi-layered narrative: 'A responsible, reflexive text... announces its politics and ceaselessly interrogates the realities it invokes while folding the teller's story into the multivoiced history that is written' (*ibid*: 225). Yet, when effectively undertaken, this work highlights absent traces, and enables us to discover other ways of seeing previously subjugated histories. One way of extending this for the future, I contend, is by drawing on performance ethnography (Denzin 2003). One could, for example, create a play based on one's research (see Goldstein 2008). Just imagine if I

staged my re-working of Stravinsky's *Rite*, drawing on Martha's dance to life through Afro-diasporic rhythms. Indeed, this is a future project on the horizons for me.

This thesis has come to its Zorbital conclusion, since it can clearly be seen that women can dance themselves to life rather than death. Indeed, death is not an option. The dominant image of the young 'virgin' dancing herself to death in Stravinsky's (1913) *Rite of Spring*, has been subverted, since the word 'virgin' holds no meaning any longer. Neither does 'asexuality' as lack. Instead, Afro-diasporic rhythms reverberate. People are dancing in the configuration of solo within a collective. The triad of the Pre-Columbian indigenous subject, Dionysus and the postcolonial African subject have reached an ecstatic union, with Zorbitality as the driving force. As this thesis has shown, by moving ecstatically together and writing about the experience of transformation from vulnerability to collective ecstasy, we can transform our histories. By displacing female (a)sexualities from their Western starting point and queering them beyond existing queering paradigms, endless possibilities of repetition and transformation are opened up. Through Zorbitality, I do not dance myself to death. I dance myself to life, through the propelling motion of the collective. The boundaries forged through language are erased. I am post-verbal. I am all motion. I can be whoever I want to be. And for the future, these are the possibilities that Zorbitality offers *all* women, as we continue dancing on the edge of time.

Coda

... What we most truly desire is to surround the self, preferably in the agony of ecstasy, thus choosing our own way of disappearing, our way of dying to and as our self (Braidotti 2006: 252).

I end with a coda, which evokes Braidotti's (2006) nomadic remembering as: 'a constant quest for temporary moments when a balance can be sustained, before the forces dissolve again and move on.' In this scene, I look back to the origins of my shifting view of female (a)sexualities, as embodied in the figure of the bomba statuette, a symbol of Puerto Rican national culture. I have internalised the spirit of Afro-diasporic rhythms and it acts as a life force as I walk through the streets. I am not alone. Rather, a dancing collective spirit accompanies me. Yet, by the end of the scene, I forget the origins of my transformation in a happy dissolution. By reaching a sense of oneness with sea and sky, I achieve the process of 'becoming-imperceptible,' as conceptualised by Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1980]: 308-311) and which Braidotti (2006: 154) describes as 'the eruption of events that construct sustainable futures.' This is not a hopeless self-dissolution. Instead, I demonstrate my death to any notions of identity.

Yet, as a woman dancing on the edge of time, I have an orientation, and it is
Zorbital.

Moving on - 20/01/2015, diary 3, pp. 73-75.

Swirl
Turn
Let loneliness live
Then constantly die.
Let me allow myself to become
That hazy figure
That bomba statuette²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Bomba is a dance style native to Puerto Rico, which demonstrates the influences of African, Spanish and Taíno cultures. It originated amongst slaves on the sugar plantations in the nineteenth century. As noted by Duany (1992), after 1815, Haitian influences also entered the genre, when a decree under the Spanish Crown allowed Haitians entry into Cuba and Puerto Rico. The dance features two or three drums, with one improvising and the other forming the bass. The melody is antiphonal and repetitive, featuring nonsense syllables that follow the rhythm. Roberts (1992) argues that bomba is more African-influenced than any of the Cuban

Silhouetted
 And projected in the light
 From the hallway.
 My table is her stage.
 My pen abets the flow of her skirt.
 The creases that propel her
 Into movement.

I am the dancer I never was.
 I dance through the streets.
 You dance with me too.
 The people move between us.
 I weave in and out
 I'm swimming
 Synchronised.
 Poised and pirouetting,
 I rush to the beat of
 London time.

This is the only way
 Forward-
 To move
 To swirl
 To dance.
 I lose myself.
 A happy dissolution
 [*Vivir mi vida*].

Happy is the day
 That I forget
 Where I gave birth
 To myself
 Anew.
 The past is irreverent.
 The past is a morgue.
 Full of corpses
 I wish not to resurrect.
 People I once thought
 Myself to be.
 Whilst failing to realise
 That I am not myself alone.

Who am I without others?

genres. Indeed, with its combination of African rhythms, drumming and dancing, many Puerto Ricans connected it with *vaudun* witchcraft. Yet, as my bomba statuettes stand suspended in motion, the witch is imbued with an empowering rhythm.

So here, yes,
On this crowded street
Dance with me
In this moment
Where a bud
Blossoms into a flower.
Slowly slowly
Time goes heavy
The past dissipates.
I am at one with sea and sky.

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